



THE THEATRE OF LIFE.

 $\mathbf{B}\mathbf{Y}$

GEORGE R. SIMS.

AUTHOR OF

"THE DAGONET BALLADS," "THREE BRASS BALLS," &c., &c.

The world's a theatre, the earth a stage
Which God and Nature do with actors fill.

—Thomas Heywood.

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THE THEATRE OF LIFE.

PROLOGUE.

THE world's a theatre! Life has its tragedies, its dramas, its comedies, and its farces. We men and women who strut and fume our little hour upon the stage are but His Majesty's servants—the servants of that great Majesty who assigns us our parts, arranges our entrances and exits, and lets the green turf curtain shut us out at last when the play is over, and we have made our farewell bow to the crowded tiers of the great world theatre. The stage is but a counterpart of the world. The phases of human joy and misery which there employ the art of the trained actor are illustrated in the Theatre of Life night after night and day after day by heroes and heroines who weep real tears, love and hate from the heart, and take part in life dramas beside which the creations of the dramatist's brain are as tinsel to real metal. It is to this theatre I would bid you come. The plays that will be set before you shall be real and human. Tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce—all shall have their Take your seat in the great amphitheatre. overture is played. The curtain rises. You are in the Theatre of Life, and you shall see what manner of plays they be that are performed there.

No. I.

LOST HAROLD.

THEY were both in the crowded court—husband and wife—and the eyes of the spectators wandered from one to the other as the great lawyers unfolded the story committed to their care.

Ethel Bransom, the young wife, deeply veiled, sat by her friends, every nerve quivering, every heartstring stretched, for on the decision of the judge that day rested all the happiness that was left to her in life. She was a wife now in name only, for the legal separation she had claimed had been granted her. The handsome man yonder, whose beautiful dark eyes ever and anon rested upon Ethel Bransom with a look half of reproach, half of menace, had, in one of his fits of wild unrest, broken away from all home ties, plunged into a career of reckless dissipation, and returned after a time, contrite and abashed, to fling himself at his wife's feet and claim her forgiveness.

Ethel Bransom was proud, and the desertion of her husband stung her to the quick. Her wrongs were common gossip. In his mad folly Harold Bransom had made no effort at concealment. The proud young beauty he had married found herself pitied and condoled with by every chattering busybody who had heard of her husband's escapade.

People said that Harold Bransom must be mad, and old acquaintances putting this and that together remembered

that he was given to sudden attacks of recklessness in the old time before he was married. In his bachelor days he had been known to break out into fits of riotous living which would cease as suddenly as they had come upon him. It was during one of these extraordinary attacks of recklessness—a feverish and sudden desire for excitement would be the best description of the disease—that Harold Bransom had made himself the hero of a scandal. The pride of the outraged wife might have yielded to the dictates of the old love had her family not insisted that she should demand a judicial separation. From the moment that his wife refused his impassioned appeal for forgiveness, Harold Bransom's heart hardened towards her. He threatened her with the direst vengeance, and his strange wild ways convinced her friends that he was liable to fits of mental aberration.

Ethel was frightened—frightened not only for herself but for her twin children, little Ethel and Harold. In the first shock of her terrible grief she had clasped her beautiful babies to her breast, and thanked God that, though her girlhood's idol was shattered, He had given her these little ones to fling their tiny arms about her neck, and to press their little lips to hers in love.

When the calm words of the law had set aside the lovers' vows whispered at God's altar in the happy long ago, and the wife's prayer for a judicial separation had been granted, it was with her blue-eyed, fair-haired babies clasped to her breast that Ethel Bransom wept the hot tears that fell upon the grave of a buried love.

And now her craven lord would snatch one of them from her. An interim order had been made that the wife should have the custody of the children. The husband claimed one—the boy.

To-day husband and wife meet again, and the eyes of the crowded court are fixed upon them. They come here to-day to fight with the law for their children. The counsel on either side have said their say, and it now rests with the grave judge to decide their fate. Shall the children be separated? Ethel Bransom's motherly heart almost stands still in an agony of suspense as Justice prepares to pronounce her children's fate. She sees her beautiful boy torn from her clasp, to grow up far from her loving care—perhaps to be taught to hate her.

Harold Bransom's eyes are fixed upon the judge. He, too, awaits the verdict with an anxious heart. Let his boy—his bright-eyed Harold—be his, and there would be some link yet to bind him to the dear dead romance of his short union with the woman he loved so dearly once, and whose love, in a mad hour of folly, he sacrificed for ever.

He does not love her now. He has crushed all tender feeling out of his heart. She and hers have conspired together to make him an outcast. They have robbed him of his children; they would drive him forth wifeless, childless, and alone, as though he were a brute, dead to every instinct of humanity. "They are my children," he cried aloud in his rage; "they are my flesh and my blood; I will not lose them both. The boy at least shall be mine if there is justice in the land. The law will not brand me as a wretch too loathsome to touch his own children. I will claim them from the law. That will be less heartless than the woman who bore them to me."

The hour fatal to the hopes of one has come at last. Husband and wife sit now with bated breath, strained eyes, and palpitating hearts, listening to the words which the grave judge is speaking.

They see what no one else can see. The crowded court is empty of all but themselves and the judge and two fair-haired, blue-eyed children. They see only little Ethel and little Harold. The judge has spoken. The doom of one victim is sealed.

With a stifled cry, the anxious mother has fallen back into the loving arms of the grey-haired lady who sits by her.

Ethel Bransom has fainted. The overstrung nerves have at length given way; the ordeal is over, and in the last sudden strain the brave heart has failed.

But the shock is one not of sorrow, but of joy. The Court has confirmed the original order. The mother retains the custody of both her children. They are to grow up and live together, these blossoms clinging to the parent bough. Little Harold and little Ethel are not to be separated. Harold Bransom is childless. He, too, has heard the calm words that fell, in the stillness of the court, like icy drops upon his heart.

He rises pale and passionless, and steals out.

As he stands for a moment in the great hall leading from the court, Ethel comes tottering out, and passes him. He strides after her to the outer door, and his dark eyes are fixed upon her as the carriage whirls her away to the children she has won from him.

She catches his glance, and the look haunts her and troubles her for days and nights afterwards. It was the look of a man who says, "Beware! It is your hour of triumph now, but mine will come."

At home, Ethel Bransom knelt in the pretty nursery where her two babies lay dozing, while the afternoon sunshine crowned their little heads with a nimbus of gold.

The children, tired with their play, lay face to face,

Ethel's little arms about her brother's neck, his cheek so close to hers that the pressure caused the same roseate flush upon the face of each sleeping babe.

Ethel Bransom fell upon her knees beside the little bed, and thanked God for His mercy. Only from that hour, because she had been in peril of losing him, the boy became the dearer to the mother's heart.

* * * * *

The years went on, and there was nothing to disturb the even tenor of Ethel Bransom's quiet life. She was wealthy, and all that money could buy she gave her children. fortune she had brought to her husband was hers alone. After the failure of his action for the custody of his child, he renounced everything, and left England. She had heard from his solicitors that he was abroad, and now and again a faint rumour from afar off reached her about him. He had been seen at Baden, and Ems, at Homburg, and at Monaco. He was leading a wild, reckless life, gambling and drinking to drown care, some said—to kill himself and end a life that was burthensome to him, said others. Ethel Bransom heard what gossip said, and her heart beat no quicker when her husband's name was mentioned. She had buried the dead love too deep for its ghost to haunt her. Harold Bransom was to her a memory, and nothing more. heart was given wholly to her children, and, as they grew from pretty babies into charming children, she found all her pleasures and all her happiness in listening to their innocent prattle, and in watching their pretty ways.

Three years had gone by, and Harold and Ethel were five years old, when suddenly, and without warning, a terrible misfortune burst upon the little household.

One fine spring morning the children went out as usual

to the park with their nurse. Mrs. Bransom stood in the window to watch them off, and her mother's heart was proud as her bonny boy kissed his little hand to her, and gaily cried, "Ta-ta!"

She watched the nurse and the children till they turned the corner of the street. The last she saw of them was little Harold still waving his hand to mamma.

In less than two hours the nurse was back with a white tace, and a terrible tale to tell.

Little Harold was lost!

With tears and sobs the frightened girl told her story. She had been talking with a strange girl in the park—a nurse-girl who sat on the same seat with her. Miss Ethel remained by her, but Master Harold was playing round the trunk of one of the great trees behind her.

Presently she turned round to call him, but he did not come.

Alarmed, she ran about, and searched everywhere; she questioned all the people about and the park-keepers—no one had noticed the child. Then she had come home.

Ethel Bransom was like a madwoman. Her calm nature was roused to frenzy as the glossy surface of a peaceful lake is roused into huge billows by the whirlwind. She raved at the girl and wrung her hands; she moaned and cried out that she was robbed of her child—that it was all a cruel plot, and that the girl was in it, and then she flung on her bonnet and rushed out, half-distracted, to the park herself, calling the child by name, now here, now there, and wringing her hands till a crowd came about, and, gently but firmly, friends forced her away.

For a time her reason trembled in the balance, and she lay at death's door with brain fever.

She recovered, only to be told that there was no news of her idolised boy—that from the hour he disappeared no trace of him could be found.

Rewards were offered, the police were employed, a description of the child was advertised, but all in vain. From the fatal day when he kissed his little hand to his mother, and bade her "Ta-ta!" Harold Bransom was seen no more.

She suspected the father, but the father was traced. Neither money nor expense was spared, and the gentleman named Harold Bransom was found to have been at Ems. He was staying at the Hotel Darmstadt on the day the child disappeared. The agent sent out to make inquiries saw the name in the book, and against it the date of Mr. Bransom's departure and his destination—Vienna.

All the workhouses, all the low lodging-houses, were searched, but little Harold was not to be found. The reward was increased, and though many came with mysterious tales of children they had seen, there were none whose story on investigation pointed to the missing child.

The years passed on, and time did its best to heal the terrible wound; but the heart of the bereaved mother was buried in the past. She struggled with her sorrow, and lived for Ethel's sake; but as Ethel grew up she knew only a quiet, gentle mother, who kissed her morning and night, and on whose beautiful face sorrow had set its indelible stamp. The child grew into a beautiful girl, but she knew and saw little of the outer world. Mrs. Bransom went nowhere, and saw no company, and Ethel was her mother's nurse. Except when she was with her governess and her masters she rarely left her mother's side.

Mrs. Bransom's health was never good after the illness which resulted from the mysterious disappearance of her beloved boy.

She would brood for hours over his fate, and wonder whether her golden-haired Harold was alive or dead. She would steal up into the little nursery, now a sacred temple of the past, and, shutting herself in, would fall upon her knees by the little bed that stood there still, and sob out her sorrows to the ear of God. She would take down from the shelves the little toys that his baby hands had played with, and kiss them passionately, losing all hope as the years went by, and making up her mind that her little one and she would meet no more on this side of the grave.

Of the boy she thought always—of his father never. For years she had not heard of him, and she had not troubled. This last grief had swept all remains of the old sorrow away. She presumed he was alive, or she would have heard from his solicitors if he were dead. Gossip had ceased to come near her, and she never heard his name. At one time she had connected him with the disappearance of her child; but when he had been traced, and it was found he was abroad at the time, she abandoned the idea.

Her child must have been stolen by tramps or bad characters, people who had never heard of the rewards offered, and perhaps now Harold was an outcast, a miserable lad, leading some dreadful life. She shuddered to think of it, and hoped rather that he might be asleep under the sheltering turf. It was all a mystery—all so strange and wonderful that, if she thought too much about it, she would go mad. So she tried not to think; she gave herself up more and more to Ethel. She was grateful for her daughter's love, and that was the only blessing left to her.

When Ethel was seventeen the girl began to droop, and the poor mother had fresh cause for anxiety.

She called in a physician, and his words were plain and to the point.

"Your daughter must have change and society; she must go abroad; this quiet, dull, monotonous indoor life is bad for her. She is drooping, and may fall into confirmed ill-health if a remedy is not sought at once."

Mrs. Bransom heard the doctor's words with dismay. She could not travel and go abroad—to whom could she confideher child?

Mrs. Bransom's aunt, old Lady Masham, came to the rescue. She had long worried her niece about Ethel; and directly she heard from the physician, who was also her own adviser, what was wrong, she insisted upon taking charge of Ethel herself. She was about to go abroad for the winter; she would take Ethel with her.

Mrs. Bransom consented gratefully. She was loth to part with her child, but she recognised the necessity.

That winter Ethel went to Italy, and Mrs. Bransom was alone with her sorrow.

* * * * *

"My dear, he's a charming young man!"

"Yes, auntie dear, I like him very much."

The speakers were Ethel Bransom and her greataunt. The whole English colony in Rome was ringing with the fame of the young Brazilian, Count D'Antas, who had just flashed like a new star into the Roman firmament.

The young man had met Ethel at several houses, for the old lady was determined that when the girl was with her she should have as much change as possible, and in her heart of hearts she cherished a scheme of making a brilliant match for her Ethel into the bargain.

"The poor child will get no change when she's shut up with her mother," said the old lady; "and so we must make hay while the sun shines."

Young Count D'Antas was remarkably polite to Lady Masham, and she took an early opportunity of cross-examining him. With charming frankness he told her how he had come to Europe to look for a wife. He talked splendid English, and when Lady Masham asked him where he learnt it, he laughed.

- "Why, I am an Englishman, I believe," he said; "at any rate, my father is one. Our title was conferred on us by the Emperor with an estate which my father bought. He went to Brazil when I was very young; I cannot remember it. He had some great trouble, I believe, and Europe was hateful to him. He went into business there, and bought land, and at last made an enormous fortune out of some mines which he purchased. The Emperor made him a noble, and now he is Count D'Antas; but he is an Englishman."
 - "And your mother? Is she an English lady?"
- "She was," answered the young Count; "but she died before my father went to Brazil."
 - "And so you are looking for a wife?"
- "Yes; an English girl," said the young man with a pleasant smile. "My father wishes me to marry. He has an idea it will keep me steady. He wants me to settle down with him, and he thinks, if I marry and take my wife to Brazil, I shall not want to wander away over the world and leave him."
 - "But you are very young."
 - "Ah! we marry young in Brazil. We are old very soon

out there. But hark, the waltz is commencing, and I am engaged to Miss Bransom."

Lady Masham looked after the young couple as they whirled past her amid the crowd of dancers.

"Dear me," said the old lady; "one would think they were cut out for each other. There is almost a resemblance in their features. I thought he wasn't dark enough for a born Brazilian."

Old Lady Masham sang the young Count's praise to Ethel, but Ethel was only lukewarm.

"Oh, I like him very much," she said.

"But suppose he asked you to be his wife?"

Ethel flushed crimson. "I have not thought about it," she murmured; "but I do not think he cares for me."

Ethel had, however, made a great impression on the young Count, an impression which he could not understand. It was hardly love, and yet it was affection. "I'm never so happy as when I'm with Miss Bransom," he said to himself; "and yet I feel as if I should like her for a sister better than a wife."

The days went on, and the time came for Lady Masham to return to England.

The day before the departure, young Count D'Antas called at their hotel to bid them farewell.

"My father is coming to Europe," he said. "I expect him in Rome daily. We shall be in England very shortly. May I bring him with me, and introduce him to you?"

Lady Masham was delighted to think that the acquaintance would be renewed under such promising circumstances, and she gave the young Brazilian a cordial invitation to her house.

Mrs. Bransom heard all about the conquest Ethel had

made, but she only sighed, for she thought that the time was coming when she would be childless indeed. Ethel leant her head upon her mother's breast, and whispered that auntie was wrong; that she was sure the young Count was not in love with her, and that she did not feel that she could ever marry him, much as she liked him.

* * * * *

The spring had come round, and brought with it the anniversary of the fatal day on which Mrs. Bransom saw her darling boy for the last time.

It was on the morning of that day that Lady Masham received a note to say that young D'Antas and his father were in town, and that they would have the pleasure of calling upon Lady Masham that afternoon. The young Brazilian's note concluded with a hope that he should have the pleasure of meeting Miss Bransom.

Lady Masham came round for Ethel, and insisted that her mother should come to her house too.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "it will do you all the good in the world; and besides, you ought to see these people. Really, for Ethel's sake, you ought to rouse yourself from this lethargy." At last Mrs. Bransom consented, and went back in the carriage with her aunt and her daughter. She was anxious about Ethel's future—anxious that when she was married it should be to a man worthy of her. Her own terrible story she had hidden from her child; but she prayed God that no such misery might ever be hers.

That afternoon Count D'Antas, the wealthy Brazilian, gave himself up to his son's guidance.

The young man had told his father about the beautiful English girl he had met in Rome, but he had not told him her name.

When his father questioned him, he said, "I will let you see her."

The young man delighted in romance. His father, devotedly attached to him, yielded to his every whim. The Count was a man whose face bore traces of some old trouble. He had not passed through the storms of life without damage. It was a pale, grave face, with beautiful dark eyes, but it was the face of a man whose past had not been a happy one.

"Then you won't tell me your charmer's name, or whither we are going?" said the Count, laughing, as he sat back in the brougham by his son's side.

"No, dad. You shall tell me what you think of her first."
The brougham whirled them along through the London

streets. The Count gazed out at the different places they passed, thinking of all that had happened since last he was in the mighty Babylon.

Presently the carriage stopped, and the Brazilians alighted at Lady Masham's door.

The young man handed his card and his father's to the servant, who showed them into the drawing-room, where Ethel and her mother and Lady Masham were seated.

The young Count entered first, closely followed by his father.

Lady Masham rose to greet them. As she did so the elder Brazilian gave a hoarse cry and started back. Mrs. Bransom, who had risen to greet him, had sunk back in her chair, her face deadly pale.

In a moment Lady Masham too had seen the cause of this mutual trouble.

Count D'Antas was her niece's husband, Harold Bransom.

Ere she could speak, ere she could think, Mrs. Bransom, pale and trembling, her eyes fixed as on a ghost, had stolen across the room and seized young D'Antas by the arm.

"If he is your father," she gasped; and then, with a wild cry of recognition, she flung her arms round the young man's neck, and, exclaiming "Harold—my son!" slipped fainting into the outstretched arms of her husband.

* * * * *

The strange story had to be told.

Ethel knew then why she felt only a sisterly love for the young Brazilian Count, and he understood why he had felt as a brother to her. They were sister and brother, whose lives had been strangely separated only to unite as strangely again.

Harold Bransom's wife opened her eyes once more in his arms. The joy of the sudden restoration of the boy she had mourned as dead dispelled the mist of years as the hot sun breaks through the mists of morning, and reveals the verdant, smiling earth. In that hour of strange meetings past memories seemed hallowed.

"Ethel," said the Count, "I am a changed man. Can you forgive me now? I cannot spare Harold after all these years. I plotted and planned till he was mine, for I was determined that he should be. My valet stayed at my hotel in my name, while I came to London, for I knew inquiries would be made at once. I watched the boy day after day, and when the opportunity came I stole my own child. But I feared the law would make me restore him, that you would track me down, and so I fled with him to a far-off land, and there I settled, and commenced to build up for my son that fortune which to-day makes me a noble of Brazil."

Mrs. Bransom forgot all save that her son was restored to

her, and soon the heart of the handsome lad warmed to the woman who had loved him so distractedly and lost him so cruelly in the days which had faded from his memory.

He had found a sister and a mother. Must a family so strangely united be forced apart again?

"In Rio I have a beautiful home," said the Count. "In Rio no one knows our story. There you and I and Harold can live together. Ethel, trust me! I have bitterly repented the past. Let the scene of our life's history close here, and a new one begin—the happiest and brightest in our strange life drama."

She is not old yet, and there are many years of life before her perhaps. If God had not willed it thus, would He have brought them together again?

Harold's mother listens to the voice of the old love.

She looks up into the face where first her girlish eyes read of love, and whispers, "For the children's sake—Harold—yes."

"For the children's sake," he murmurs in reply. "God bless you, Ethel!"

And Lady Masham looks across to the window where Harold and Ethel are talking earnestly, and murmurs, "And I haven't found a husband for you, after all, Ethel."

"My dear auntie," answers Ethel, taking Harold's hand, and raising it to her lips with a merry laugh, "I told you I should like him as a brother best."

No. II.

JEZEBEL.

"FRANK, my boy, you cannot—you will not—be so mad as to marry this woman!"

"My dear governor," answered Frank Hilton, "I really don't see why you should be so alarmed. Mrs. Artaud is young, handsome, well educated, and a lady. I don't say this gossip about matrimonial intentions is true; but, supposing it is, what is there so very dreadful in the affair?"

Colonel Hilton put down his wine-glass—he and his son were dining tête-à-tête—and looked earnestly into the young man's face.

"Frank," he said, "I would rather see you in your grave than married to Clarice Artaud. You are young, and have a brilliant future before you. Already you have made a name at the Bar; you have but to give your natural talent scope, and the highest honours of the profession may be yours. Once married to an extravagant and frivolous woman, I know enough of your character to foresee the result. It would be disastrous."

"And so, dad, you fancy that, if I had a beautiful and accomplished wife, I should leave off work, live over my income, and go to the devil."

"Don't misunderstand me, Frank," answered the old Colonel, putting his hand lovingly upon his son's. "I know what a generous, impulsive, good-hearted fellow you are, and how hard it is for you to believe evil of anyone.

Bring me a sweet, innocent English girl—a woman whose influence will shed a halo of happiness about your home—and I will bless her. But, for God's sake, never think of Clarice Artaud as your wife!"

The young barrister hesitated to reply. He knew that the gossip which had reached his father's ears had its foundation in fact. He knew that he was passionately in love with the beautiful brunette, and that he had whispered words to her which in honour he could not withdraw.

"Let's change the subject, dad," he said presently, filling his glass with a nervous hand; "we're not likely to agree upon it."

The old Colonel sighed.

"Ah, Frank, I'm afraid it's worse than I thought. It is my duty as your father to tell you what I know of this woman who has caught you in her toils."

"I know there have been vile calumnies spread about concerning Clarice!" exclaimed the young man indignantly; "but they are the work of vile enemies—of jealous women—of the members of Captain Artaud's family, who hated her from the first."

The old man shook his head.

"Artaud was my dearest friend, Frank," he said. "When he lay dying of the mysterious malady which carried him off, he sent for me, and confided to me a terrible secret. It was but a suspicion, and he bade me never reveal it. The promise I made to the dead I shall keep; but I learnt enough from him, in the last hours of his mortal agony, to be able now solemnly to declare that his widow is no fit wife for you or any honourable man."

"My dear father, Clarice is the victim of the hallucination of a man whose brain was disordered. Artaud led her a miserable life. He drank himself to death, and in his delirium suspected everyone."

"Do you know what she was when he married her?"

"Yes, I do—a Spanish actress. She has told me all. But her career was an honourable one. Artaud was her first lover, and he married her."

"Yes, he was a fine old English gentleman when this Spanish Circe caught him in her toils; a gallant soldier, who had fought his country's battles, and bore the scar of many an honourable wound. He died a miserable death. A secret sorrow drove him to drink, and he died cursing the woman to whom he had given his name. And it is this woman my son would marry! Frank, it shall never be! She was an adventuress when she married poor Artaud—she is an adventuress now."

"It's a lie!—a dastardly lie!" cried the barrister, springing to his feet.

The old Colonel's brow darkened, and his calm, kind face became suddenly stern.

"Is the poison doing its deadly work already," he said, "that for this woman's sake you insult your father, Frank?"

"It is you, sir, who insult me. I will hear no more of it. Clarice Artaud is a noble woman, who threw herself away upon a battered roué, and her reward was the vilest ingratitude. He left his fortune to distant relatives, and vilely robbed the woman who had sacrificed her splendid youth to his old age. I will yet convince you, sir, that Mrs. Artaud is a grossly maligned woman."

"Never, Frank! but let us not have our first quarrel over her. Shake hands, lad! I forgive you for your hasty words."

Frank clasped his father's outstretched hand, and his eyes filled with tears.

"God bless you, dad!" he exclaimed. "I'm sorry for what I said. But if you knew how I loved Clarice!—I cannot conquer it. I believe she is the soul of goodness and purity, and it is hard to find my dear old father joining in hunting her down."

Colonel Hilton listened to this confession of love with nervous terror. The accents of the young man were so genuine that the old soldier's brave heart almost stood still. He had hoped that Clarice Artaud had but cast a momentary spell over Frank's impressionable nature. He saw now that the case was far more serious than that, and that violent opposition would but cast oil upon the flames.

So he held his peace, and let Frank go home to his chambers without another word on the subject.

Only when he sat alone, and the quiet room was filled with the dim forms of those he had known and loved in the long ago, memory carried him back to two death-beds—to the summer night when his dying wife gasped out to him a prayer to watch over and protect her boy from the perils of the great world, and to the chill autumn morning, years later, when his old companion in arms whispered into his ear a terrible story, of which a Spanish actress was the heroine. And now the child had grown to be a man, and had given his noble heart into this woman's keeping.

"You shall not have my son, Circe," he muttered. "I will tear him from your deadly clasp at the peril of my own life."

And even while the old soldier registered a vow to save his boy, the young barrister sat in Clarice's pretty drawingroom at St. John's Wood, and, surrendering his soul to the enchantment of her spells, vowed to make her his wife in spite of all.

* * * * * *

The fascinations of the beautiful Spanish widow had enslaved the young barrister body and soul. In his eyes she was a maligned angel—a woman, whom any man might be proud to fold in his arms and honour with the sacred name of wife.

Married to the late Captain Artaud at four-and-twenty, and a widow in two years, Clarice was not thirty when Frank Hilton made her an offer of his hand and heart.

He had known her but slightly during her husband's lifetime. Until the Captain lay on his death-bed Colonel Hilton had looked upon Clarice as his friend's wife, and had dreamt no wrong of her. Frank visited the house with his father, and therefore when he met the widow at a friend's house they were like old friends. The acquaint-ance gradually ripened into something warmer, and at last Gossip coupled their names.

Clarice was just the woman to appeal to the sentimental side of a big-hearted, romantic young fellow's nature. She was beautiful as an artist's dream; the rich Spanish blood mounted in her olive cheeks, her dark eyes flashed with the Southern fire, and the trained accent and gesture of the actress lent a charm to her every word and action.

Spiteful rumour declared that Mrs. Artaud was extravagant, and that, her luxurious tastes being now utterly beyond her means, she was looking out for what is vulgarly termed "a good catch."

Such a catch was Frank. He was an only son. He was already on the high road to fortune and fame at the Bar. His father, the Colonel, was a man of considerable property,

and, being close upon seventy, could not long keep his heir out of the enjoyment of it. Gossip said that Frank Hilton was worth Mrs. Artaud's serious consideration. Gossip was not far wrong. She had not only considered him in the light of a husband; she had made up her mind to accept him in that character. But there was another consideration which was even more powerful with Clarice than Frank's prospects in life. She hated his father with all the hatred a Spaniard is capable of. Since her husband's death he had treated her with the utmost hauteur and coldness. Why, she never imagined. She concluded that he espoused the side of Captain Artaud's relations, and had not scrupled to show his enmity openly. To win his son would be a glorious revenge.

She put forth all the marvellous power of her beauty, all the subtle fascination of her natural grace, and she held the young man at her mercy.

The hour when, falling on his knees and pouring forth his passionate love in burning words, he asked her to be his wife, was the hour of her triumph.

When the door had closed behind him that evening, and Clarice sat alone by the dying embers of her little drawingroom fire, she showed her white teeth, and the globes of the gaselier re-echoed with her sharp, ringing laugh.

It was a laugh of triumph. It was the laugh which the Rhine sailor must have heard when his frail craft was engulfed in the torrent, and, looking up, he beheld the siren of the Lurleyberg combing her golden locks.

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"We understand that a marriage is arranged between Mr. Frank Hilton, the rising young barrister, and the beautiful Mrs. Artaud, widow of the late Captain Artaud." The Society journal which contained this item of intelligence fell from Colonel Hilton's hand.

"My boy—my poor misguided boy!" he cried; "and this is the reason you have deserted your poor old father. Oh, Frank, Frank, I would rather have seen you in the grave, where your poor mother sleeps quietly, waiting until I come, than have had this fate befall you. But it shall not be! While there is life in this old frame I will keep the vow I made your mother, and protect you from the perils of the world. There could be no deadlier peril than lurks in this woman's arms."

Two hours later Colonel Hilton handed his card to the housemaid at Mrs. Artaud's villa.

Clarice was nothing loth to receive him. The interview was an early opportunity for her to enjoy her revenge. Her marriage was already announced. Her victim was safe. The agony of the victim's father was a part of the programme to which she looked forward. But the old soldier was not the humble suppliant for mercy the proud beauty anticipated.

He threatened.

She laughed his threats to scorn. He pleaded; she was cold as ice.

- " Name your own terms, Clarice Artaud," he said.
- "You insult me, sir!" said Clarice, with a studied look of disdain. "Your son is my affianced husband. That alone should command your respect."
- "You do not marry my son for himself, madam. You marry him to repair your shattered fortune—to enjoy a position in society, and to gratify your luxurious tastes with his money."
 - "As you will," answered Clarice, showing her white

teeth; "and yet, knowing this, you ask me to give him up. No; I will bear your name, Colonel Hilton. You have maligned mine, and I claim yours in its place. In marrying your son I protect myself from calumny as well as from poverty."

For a moment Colonel Hilton sat silent. Clarice watched him with her keen eyes, wondering what was passing in his mind. She watched for his next words as a panther watches for the next struggle for freedom of its quivering prey.

"Mrs. Artaud," cried the old soldier, presently, "I will be a party to this comedy no longer."

He rose from his seat, and came across to the ottoman where she was reclining in an attitude of studied grace.

"Listen, Clarice," he whispered, his voice husky with emotion. "You claim my name; it shall be yours. You claim my fortune; I lay it at your feet. I love you, Clarice; will you be my wife?"

The Spanish actress forgot her art. The strange proposal of her affianced husband's father had thrown her completely off her guard.

She scarcely knew what she stammered out in reply.

"All I have shall be yours, Clarice," continued the Colonel, his old face flushed with excitement—"all. You shall spend my money like water; you shall be your own mistress—only be my wife."

"But your son," gasped Clarice. "He--"

"I have no son," exclaimed the old man, eagerly. "Henceforward I live but for you. Refuse me, and your one wish shall be foiled. If you marry Frank I will disinherit him."

Gradually Clarice recovered from her surprise, and

grasped the situation. When the Colonel left her house an hour later he left it with her promise to marry him secretly, and at once.

That afternoon she went out of town, writing Frank that she was called away on urgent private affairs to Spain.

A fortnight later he received a letter, bearing the Madrid postmark—she had sent it there to be posted—a short, hurried scrawl, merely saying that his Clarice would be home again soon.

A fortnight after that he heard that she was back, and hastened to her house.

He was shown into the drawing-room, and started back in astonishment as his father rose to greet him, and stood between himself and Clarice, who was at the far end of the room.

The old man's face was deadly pale as he came forward and took his son's hand.

- "Frank, my dear son," he said, in a low voice, "I fear you will think you have been treated very badly. I told you you should never marry Clarice. You never will."
- "You are mistaken, sir," answered the son coldly. "Our marriage will take place very shortly."
 - "It will never be, Frank."
 - "And pray why, sir?"
- "Because Clarice Artaud is Clarice Hilton already. She is my wife."

For a moment the young man stood as one in a dream. Then the torrent of his passion burst from him, and he called down the curses of Heaven upon those who had played him this dastardly trick. From that hour he cast his father off, and registered a solemn vow he would look upon his face no more.

He paused at the door, and turned his colourless face towards the woman who had betrayed his honest love so foully.

"Clarice," he cried, "I forgive you. You are the victim of this man's knavery. He tried to poison my mind against you because he coveted you for himself. He did not hesitate to trample your fair fame under his feet in order to frighten me from your side. Clarice, you have broken my heart. May God forgive you!"

Then, with one last look of terrible scorn at his father, the young man rushed from the room.

As the door closed behind him the Colonel fell back on the ottoman, and, burying his face in his hands, sobbed like a child.

* * * * * *

The Society papers were full of it.

The marriage of the beautiful Mrs. Artaud with Colonel Hilton was the peg for the most charmingly spiteful paragraphs. Gossips gloated maliciously at the idea of the son who had been cut out by his old father, and the conduct of the heartless jilt Clarice Artaud was a target at which all the ladies discharged their sharpest arrows.

Clarice held her head high, and laughed the sneers of the world to scorn. She had thrown Frank over without a moment's hesitation when she found that a richer prize still was within her grasp.

She never doubted for a moment that her beauty had fascinated the old man, and that his former enmity had succumbed to the magic of her presence.

Swiftly was she undeceived.

From the hour that she crossed his threshold, and took her place as the mistress of Colonel Hilton's house, she found she was his wife in name alone. She had her apartments, and he had his. His bankers' book was at her disposal, his servants were at her command. She was mistress of all, and her word was law. She was treated with the stateliest courtesy by her new lord, but never once did his lips seek hers in love.

Clarice was piqued. She, who had been accustomed to see all men at her feet, found it incomprehensible that this man, who had wrecked his son's affection and made himself the hero of a scandal to win her, should hold aloof from her when she was his, and treat her as a queenly visitor, not as a wife.

It was a fortnight after their return from the short honeymoon on the Continent, and although it was late at night the Colonel sat in his library busy with his papers.

He read and re-read the sheet of writing that lay before him.

It contained the last words of his old friend Artaud, the terrible secret which the dying man had gasped out to him, and which he had afterwards written down lest one day it might be needed when his memory had failed him.

Then he locked it carefully in his secrétaire, and wrote a letter to his son.

"My dear Frank,—I am going to do something to-night which may be fatal to me. If I die mysteriously or suddenly, and have no time to send for you, my secret may die with me. For your sake that must not be. I warned you against marrying Clarice Artaud, and told you you should not. You cannot now. I have saved you. Let me tell you why. On his death-bed Artaud confessed to me a secret which I promised not to reveal unless I could absolutely prove the truth of his suspicions. He told me that the woman he had married he had discovered to be an abandoned adventuress.

a woman whose whole past life was evil, and who married him simply to be mistress of his wealth. When he became so suddenly and strangely ill, he himself attributed it to the excesses into which he had plunged to drown his sorrow. One dark night, lying alone in the chamber to which, on account of his violence, he was confined, he woke suddenly, and felt rather than saw there was someone in the room.

"At first he was so terrified that he could not move. He saw the arm of the figure move gently from the table by his bed, where his drink stood, to his lips, and then something cold touched them.

"Conquering the fascination which held him, by a sudden effort he leapt up and seized the hand. There was a fierce struggle in the darkness, but never a word uttered. Mad with rage and terror, the Captain drew the figure down towards him and buried his teeth in its flesh.

"There was a sharp cry, and he knew then that he had bitten a woman's shoulder.

"He was weak and ill, and the sudden exertion exhausted him.

"With a terrific effort the figure wrenched itself from his grasp, and my poor friend fell back in a swoon.

"When he came to his senses it was broad daylight, and lying by his side was the bottle of chloral which had stood on the table by his bed. It contained only a few drops.

"He was accustomed to take it to make him sleep. In the night his mysterious visitor had attempted to give him a dose so large that, had he swallowed it, he would never have woke again. The bottle doubtless would have been found clenched in his hand, and the verdict of the coroner's jury would have been 'Death from an overdose of chloral,' or 'Suicide.' "This story he told to me.

"He suspected everyone else about him, and would make a confidant of no one.

"To-night I am going to prove or disprove a suspicion which haunted my dead friend and has haunted me.

"I am an old man, alone now, and unprotected, and I may peril my life in this undertaking, but, whether I fail or succeed, God bless you ever, my darling boy!"

* * * * *

It was two o'clock in the morning, and Clarice lay fast asleep in the splendid room set apart for her. The snowy linen and the costly lace of the pillows on which her head reposed threw her dark features into glorious relief. She lay, sleeping softly, one beautiful arm thrown outside the crimson satin quilt; her lips were parted, and she smiled in her sleep. Her breathing was soft and regular as an innocent child's.

Softly the handle of the door turned, and Colonel Hilton crept into the chamber of his wife.

His honest old soldier's heart rebelled at what he was doing, and his pale face was flushed, half with desperation, half with shame, but he had set himself an awful task, and he would not turn back.

Cautiously he stole to the side of the bed where the woman who bore his name lay asleep.

She looked so beautiful that for a moment he relented. But, gathering courage, he nerved himself for the task.

The light was low in the chamber, and it fell in softened arays upon the sleeping beauty.

Gently the old soldier, with a trembling hand, drew down the quilt until the left shoulder of his wife was suncovered.

It was the left shoulder he wished to see.

Still he hesitated.

His gallantry rebelled at thus taking advantage of his sleeping prey, but he remembered that this woman would have robbed him of his son, and then with a relentless hand he tore the snowy covering fiercely from the shoulder it concealed.

Clarice, aroused, started up with a cry.

But she was too late.

There, low down on the bare shoulder, were the scars of an old wound—the scars where a man's fierce teeth had dug into the tender flesh, and mangled it.

The Colonel had found the would-be murderess of his old friend. It was his wife!

* * * * *

The beautiful wife of Colonel Hilton was destined to furnish still further food for gossip.

She disappeared, and at last people grew tired of asking what had become of her.

When she woke and found the eyes of her husband fixed upon the scarred shoulder, she guessed all. She knew then that she was hunted down.

The next day she gathered all her jewels and valuables together, and fled to the Continent.

Frank gradually came to know the noble part his father had played in a great life drama—how he had married this woman to save his son from her clutches, and how, but for this noble sacrifice, he might now have been blighted for life, his home tainted for ever with the shadow of Jezebel.

"I feared that she would bear you children, Frank," said the Colonel. "I knew her to be a profligate, and I suspected her of being a murderess. Heaven only knows

what ghastly secrets lie buried in that woman's guilty past! God forbid that her blood and yours should ever have mingled in the children that are some day to sit upon my knee!"

A secret of that guilty past came to light, which relieved the Colonel of all fear for the future. One day a fierce Spaniard, a circus rider of some renown, called upon him, and raved out a story against a Spanish woman named Clarice who had treacherously deceived him.

She was his wife when she married Captain Artaud, but she had paid him well to hold his peace. She was his wife when she married Colonel Hilton, and she had paid him still—but now she sent him no more money. If the Colonel did not pay him some he would claim his wife.

He had to claim her in the law courts, where the young barrister forced him to tell his story, and where, thanks to his confession, the Colonel was enabled to strike off the vile fetters which for his dear son's sake he had gladly put on.

To-day a fair-haired laddie sits upon the old man's knee, and calls him "Gan'pa," and Frank's wife is a sweet English girl, whose innocent love has long ago banished from the young man's heart all memory of Jezebel.

No. III.

HAPPY JACK.

HAPPY JACK!

That was the name he was known by all over the country, and there were few workhouse masters who hadn't a kind word or a nod for Happy Jack when, tired and travel-stained, he came to the casual ward for a night's rest.

He was quite the gentleman, was Happy Jack, in spite of his ragged clothes and his empty pockets; and many a passer by, struck by the handsome, bronzed face, the bright black eyes, and picturesque attitude of the lounging vagrant, would look twice at him, and wonder what his history had been.

Let us ring up the curtain on his life's drama and see.

It is a charming scene in which the first act is laid. It is in a stately mansion in the North of England. On the smooth lawn in front of the house a lady and a little boy are playing. The sun is warm, the scent of the flowers fills the air; there is bright, joyous life everywhere. The child, chasing a butterfly, screams with delight as he darts from flower to flower in pursuit, trampling over the beds in unchecked eagerness. Presently the child, leaving the butterfly, comes running across the lawn to where the lady stands watching him. She darts away, and he runs in pursuit. Slipping between the trees, the lady eludes the boy, and each time she steps away just as his little hands

are about to clasp her gown, she screams with delight as though she were a child herself.

Her brown cheeks are scarlet with excitement, her black eyes glisten, her dark hair, unfettered by aught, flies in the breeze, and she runs now here, now there, with the fleetness of foot and the suppleness of limb which one commonly associates with women who have not grown up under the yoke of fashion.

Yet the lady is the mistress of this stately mansion, and the child is heir to all the land that lies around it.

While the sport is at its height, and the merry laughter of mother and child is ringing clear upon the summer air, a tall, stern-looking gentleman comes from the house.

"Zara!" he says angrily; "come here."

The play is stopped in a moment. The child runs to his mother, and clutches her dress. The lady, a look of annoyance on her beautiful face, comes slowly to where her husband stands, looking as grave as a judge who is about to sentence a prisoner.

"How can you be so foolish, Zara?" he says. "You are shouting like a village wench at play, and running about like a lunatic. What will the servants think?"

"I am very sorry," says the lady, drooping her eyelids and making a little mouth. "I forgot for a moment; I will take care to remember in future. Come, Paul, we will go into the house."

The gentleman looked after his wife and child as they went by him into the house, and he heaved a sigh.

"I shall never civilise her," he said; "never be able to give her her proper place in society, and I tremble for the child more and more every day. He is a born gipsy."

All the people round about could tell you the story of the

little group you have just seen at the hall. The gentleman, before he was the owner of the stately mansion and a local magnate, was a poor artist. In the course of his Bohemian travels he took up with a gipsy tribe, and became one of them—wandered from place to place with them, and led their life. He fell in love with Zara, the beautiful daughter of the gipsy chief, and at last induced her to wed him—to separate herself for ever from her tribe—to give up the wild, romantic life, and be a lady.

It was a hard task for the daughter of the forest, but she was devoted to her husband, and sacrificed herself completely in order that he might be pleased.

It was not such a hard struggle at first, for the artist was strong in Paul Royston, and in the first years of their married life he retained much of his old Bohemianism. But four years after her baby was born the wheel of fortune turned up a prize for her husband. A young and vigorous life which stood between Paul Royston and a splendid estate was sacrificed in the hunting field, and the careless artist found himself suddenly a country gentleman, the lord of broad acres and one of England's stateliest homes. It was then for the first time he looked at his gipsy wife with doubt, and wished she had been a lady.

The gay laugh that had pleased him once now grated on his ears, the natural *abandon* and grace of the child of the forest shocked and distressed him, and day by day he insisted upon binding the free limbs of the Bohemian with the shackles and fetters of society.

Poor Zara, loving her lord devotedly, read with her quick gipsy eyes the secret of his heart. She saw how, when his grand guests came, he blushed for her, how day by day he grew colder and colder, and how even her bright-

eyed beautiful boy—her little Paul—failed to bring a smile to the gloomy face of his father.

Paul Royston was tired of his wife. His blood ran more slowly now than in the old days when the dark-eyed gipsy girl sent it coursing through his veins. With position and wealth the nature of the man had changed. The romantic phase of his existence had passed away, to be succeeded by the matter-of-fact, and he cursed the folly which had led him to link himself for life with an outcast—a woman without education—almost without civilisation.

He saw only poor Zara's defects now. He was blind to the rich dower which God had given her. He forgot her beauty and grace, the artless nature unpolluted by the artificiality of society, the pure mind unpoisoned by worldliness, the loving, noble heart that beat for him alone until the little one came to divide it with him.

The gipsy wife, frowned upon and treated with a coldness which chilled her warm nature, terrified lest by some gaucherie she should offend her lord, passed the long hours of the day alone with her little son. Sitting in the room that was hers, and with the window flung open and the fresh air blowing upon her tear-stained cheeks, she would watch the birds that flew by and envy them.

Memories of the old life crowded upon her in those dark hours, and there came to her a fierce longing to be free once more, and to go back to the tents of her people.

To follow her artist lover she had become an alien. She had broken with the old chief, her father, and the dark-skinned wanderers among whom she had spent her child-hood and youth. She had, at her husband's request, severed herself from her tribe for ever, and she did not even know if they were in England now or if they had wandered abroad.

Poor Zara! Let the curtain fall slowly on the first act of this drama in which she is the heroine. Look at her well as she sits by the open window, her boy upon her knee. She is singing to him a quaint ballad, that many a time in the old days she has warbled at the country fairs, and drew a shower of silver into the common purse of the tribe.

Little Paul repeats the song after his mother, and, as the curtain falls upon the scene, the rich contralto and the childish treble blend, and a wave of sweet sound floats softly to the ears of the moody Squire, who sits in his library below.

"Curse her!" he mutters; "she's teaching the boy her gipsy tricks already."

It is night when the curtain rises again—dark night. You can scarcely see the great house that was once bathed in sunshine, for the gloom of a moonless winter night enwraps it. The wind sweeps through the leafless trees, moaning like a doomed spirit in agony. The snow lies thick around, and the drift has gathered in places to the height of a tall man's shoulders.

It is on such a night as this that the Squire's wife comes hurrying down the long avenue, with streaming hair, and eyes dilated in agony. Across her face, hidden by the darkness of the night, there is a scarlet wheal.

He has struck her.

Struck her in his blind rage as none but a coward could. The long pent-up remorse, the secret brooding over the error of the past, the nursed discontent, has culminated tonight, and the Squire, irritated by some fancied slip on his wife's part, has given the reins to his long-checked

passion, and it has dragged him with it to the verge of perdition.

In his frenzy he has uttered all the secrets of his heart; he has taunted the cowering woman with her past; he has upbraided her with marring his later life; he has with brutal cruelty hissed out that his love is changed to hate, and denounced her as an adventuress who has caught him in her toils.

The blood of her race flew to the gipsy woman's face as the last blow went home, and with her bright eyes flashing, and her bosom heaving with womanly pride, Zara flung his taunts back to her craven lord, while he, maddened by the truths that stung him to the quick, leapt at her, and struck her across the face with his riding-whip, and rushed from the room.

All that evening, tearless and passionless, Zara sat with her boy alone, telling him not to grieve for her when she was gone, and bidding him think sometimes of his gipsy mother. The boy saw the red wheal across his mother's face, and asked her what it was.

"It is the death mark of our tribe," she answered. "It is the mark that means that either the face that bears it or the hand that set it there will soon cease to be living flesh."

The boy, terrified by his mother's words, questioned her again, but she kissed him, and bade him put his arms round her neck, and listen to something she would tell him, and that he was to remember all his life if he never saw her again.

Then she told her child the old legend of her tribe, and bade him, if ever he stood in need of friends, to remember that he was one of them, and that, if the gipsy blood in his veins should ever make him look upon life between four

walls as a prison, the tents of her people would be open to him.

She had pined for the air and freedom herself, and had felt the fetters. "The time will come, Paul," she whispered, "when you will have to choose; your heart will show you where happiness lies."

The boy listened to his mother, scarcely understanding all she said then, but treasuring it up in his memory. Not idly was the warning given, for the mother had long ago known that the handsome lad was gipsy at heart. A thousand little things had revealed it to her, and now that her life was ended—now that the roof of her husband could shelter her no more—she thought of her child's future, and told him what blood was in his veins.

That night, when the great house was wrapped in silence, Zara kissed her sleeping boy, and stole out. Nothing of her lord's did she take with her. She had resisted taking her child, and that was all she coveted. The old gipsy garb that she had kept, and that once her husband had painted her in, she dragged from its hiding-place and put on. She took the golden ring from her finger, and left it with all her trinkets, and then went out into the wind and snow, bound on a journey which had for its bourne the grave.

She intended to wander until she found some gipsy tribe among whom she could die and be buried according to the rites of her race, thus losing her identity as Paul Royston's wife; but the Providence which shapes our destinies willed it otherwise.

The great snowstorm of that year is famous in the annals of history. Hundreds of people perished by the roadside, tramps and strangers were lost on moor and hill, and lay down in the snow to sleep the slumber that knows no waking.

Among the bodies thus found was that of a handsome gipsy woman, who must have become separated from her tribe and perished in the storm.

She was found in a lonely part of the country, and the parish buried her as a wandering outcast. Chance brought the story of a gipsy woman who had been found to the ears of Squire Royston, and he held his peace, for she was already buried as a nameless wanderer. But he knew that he was free, and that the gipsy wife would trouble him no more.

* * * * *

A year after the death of his first wife the Squire married again—a woman in his own sphere of life. Children were born, and on them the father lavished his affection. His eldest-born, with the gipsy blood in his veins, he treated with cold indifference.

The lad grew up wild, untutored, and neglected. All the people about the place loved him for his frank, merry ways, but his father hated him. Young Paul's greatest delight was to wander off into the woods and spend the day under the open sky, singing his merry song like a bird that has found its freedom, or lying on the green banks, his face turned upward to the sun. At home he was tolerated, and no more. He was the heir, and the outward decencies of society the Squire respected; but the boy treasured his mother's story in his heart, and day by day the yearning grew stronger in him to wander away from his gilded cage and live the free roving life he fancied must be so beautiful.

When he was sixteen, an event happened which decided his fate. A valuable horse was ridden and lamed by one of the stable boys. The lad, to clear himself, declared that Mr. Paul had ridden the animal last. Paul stoutly denied it, and his father called him a liar, and, to punish him, sent him to his room, declaring he should be locked in for a week. In his temper the Squire wounded the boy to the quick. He taunted him with being gipsy bred, and declared he was a disgrace to the name he bore.

That night Paul tied the sheets of his bed together, fastened them to the window, and slipped down them, dropping into the garden.

He shook off the dust of his feet from the home and the life that were hateful to him, and determined to rove and earn his bread as best he could.

He wandered from village to village, and when he was hungry he sang the ballads his mother had taught him, and the songs he had learned from the country girls on his father's estate. Sometimes the people gave the handsome lad money, sometimes a meal, and many a farmer's barn was open to him when the night shadows fell and the wanderer craved a lodging.

Never once, as the years went on, did Paul Royston regret the choice he had made. The life came naturally to him. He loved the air and the sunshine, the flowers, the birds, and the trees, and he revelled in them to his heart's content.

His face never lost its smile, or his dark eyes their roguish laughter. The people in the villages called him Happy Jack, and the name clung to him.

Moving now here, now there, now housed in a farm-house, now sleeping in the open with a fallen tree for a pillow, now craving the shelter of the workhouse for a stormy night, Happy Jack passed from youth to manhood,

from manhood to middle age, and never once would he have exchanged his night's lodging for the shelter of his wealthy father's roof.

In his fortieth year Happy Jack's voice left him, and he could charm the people no more with his songs.

A violent cold caused him an affection of the throat which hushed the sweet music for ever, and then Happy Jack had to rough it in earnest, for the times were hard, and he had no song to sing for his supper.

But he was Happy Jack still, and few grudged him a crust or a help upon the road.

In the summer he wanted little, but the winter, as his strong constitution began to break, was harder to bear; and when the roads were bad, and the skies pitiless, Happy Jack would hurry on to the places where he was best known and surest of a welcome.

In many a village there were tales of him told that kept his memory green. Here he had saved a farmer's child, at the peril of his life, when a fire threatened the farmhouse. There he had cured a dame's little one with a herb which he had plucked by the roadside; and in one part of the country he was almost revered, for he had tramped two hundred miles for evidence, and saved Widow Martin's son who was to be hanged for poaching, and would not take a penny when it was all over, and the law had proved his innocence. The old dame flung her arms about the vagrant's neck and blessed him, and there was many a wet eye in court; but Happy Jack bowed like a gentleman to the judges, who complimented him, and went on his way over the moorland empty-handed.

Did he never love?

Yes, once. Once only did his resolve tremble in the

balance. When Alice, the farmer's daughter, whose little brother he had saved, came and thanked him, and shook him by the hand, there was something in her sweet face that made him long to be a gentleman again. He saw that the girl was taken with his handsome face and gay Bohemian manner, so he stooped down and kissed her lily hand, and, waving his hat, went on his road.

He didn't come that way again for years, not till Alice was plump and matronly, and tossed a little urchin of her own upon her knee.

Happy Jack! Happier far leading his vagabond life than many a one crowned with this world's glories whom all his fellows envy. Happier far than the man who, standing in his place, inherited the estate and the fortune that should have been his.

* * * * *

Squire Royston, when his gipsy son fled, forbade all mention of his name, and obliterated him from his memory. "Like mother, like son," he said. "Let him go. Sooner or later he would have been a gipsy. He could never be a gentleman."

When the years went by, and the heir made no sign, the Squire felt secure, and came to his death-bed knowing that the fine gentleman, his eldest son by the second wife, would enter into undisputed possession of all.

It was on a sweet spring morning that the closing scene in the drama of Paul Royston's life took place.

Happy Jack had wandered nearer than ever he had been in his vagabond life to the home of his boyhood.

He came to the old familiar woods when the sun was at its height, and bygone memories crowded upon him as he recognised the old landmarks.

He cast himself down by a knoll where the violets clustered thick, and closed his eyes in reverie.

The story, dimly remembered, of his gipsy mother came to him again, and he sighed for a moment; then the sweet air swept across his face, and in its fragrance the one sorrow of his life floated away.

He thought of the homes where he was welcome still—of the bright-eyed lasses who had a smile for Happy Jack—whom he could remember babes upon their mothers' knees. He thought of the old men whose dull eyes would light when he came into the village alehouse and poured out his reminiscences of the past, when they were hale and hearty fellows and he was but a stripling. And the old dames, too, were glad to see him, for they could remember the songs that he could sing and what a handsome fellow he was.

Happy Jack was getting old himself now, and his fame was passing into a legend; but gossiping tongues kept his fame alive, and even at the workhouse there was no rough word for him.

Lying in the old wood, sweet memories crowding upon him, he slept, and his dreams were filled with happy visions of the past.

He slept deeply. The afternoon sun sank, and he did not wake. The grey shadows of evening fell on field and flower, and the night bird sang in the trees; but the eyes of Happy Jack were closed.

They were open in another world—in a world where there is no more wandering. Happy Jack had died in his sleep, in a wood upon the estate that was his birthright.

They told the new squire that a famous vagrant, named Happy Jack, had been found dead almost at his gates, and

the Squire sighed. He had wealth and all that the world holds best to have, but his life was a misery and a burden to him. He envied the vagrant who had earned the name of Happy Jack, and little dreamt he was envying the long-lost stepbrother whose wealth he possessed.

It was in the spring of last year that Happy Jack was found dead, his smiling face upturned to the open sky, his requiem sung by the free choristers of God. His fame as a wandering outcast was so great that the story of his death in the quiet woods found its way into the great London papers! but the true story of his life is told now for the first time.

Happy Jack! How few dramas in the great Theatre of Life are so pure and wholesome as that of which you were the vagabond hero!

No. IV.

OLD PARSON RAYNE.

There is a quaint, old-fashioned parsonage standing on the great high road that leads from Audrey End to London—from the sleepiest village in all Hertfordshire to the mighty Babylon. In the summer, when the roses twine about the porch, and the sweet, old-fashioned flowers in the little front garden scent the air, passing strangers, dusty with travel, stop and lean over the low stone wall, and gaze admiringly at the picture before them; but in the winter, when the roses are gone, when the fierce wind shrieks among the leafless trees, and the snow lies thick around, the traveller passes on, and thrusts his hands deeper than ever into his great-coat pockets, for the sight of the lonely house chills him to the marrow.

There is a story about the parsonage, and any man, woman, or child in Audrey End will tell it you. Eight years ago one Christmas Eve, old Parson Rayne stood with his white face pressed against the great bow-window, and saw his only son, his brave Eric, stride along the broad road, his face turned Londonwards. They had parted in anger—parted with never a farewell, with never a God-speed—and from that day to this no Eric had returned out of the grey haze that hangs, autumn and winter, like a veil over the brow of Audrey Hill.

It was the old story of youthful folly—of hot blood in young veins, and scrape after scrape, until at last a for-

giving father would forgive no more. Fierce words were spoken, and a proud lad, his handsome face distorted with passion, cast aside home and kindred in his mad infatuation, and left the old home, vowing that it should know him no more.

Old Parson Rayne in his passion had uttered words which stung the lad to the quick. He bade his son begone, and disgrace him no more. And the son took him at his hasty word, and went.

From that hour the parson had been an altered man. He was alone—alone in the great house with old Scotch Janet, who had been his faithful servant thirty years, who had taken baby Eric from the poor dead mother's arms, and loved him as her own bairn.

There is a picture which hangs over the fireplace in the sitting-room. It is the portrait of a blue-eyed, golden-haired boy of six; and old Janet looks at that picture often till her eyes are red, for that is her bairn—her bonny lad, that she loved as her own. That is the pretty boy who grew to be a handsome lad, and broke his father's heart, went away to London, and was heard of no more.

Old Janet had her hands full now, or perhaps she would have broken her heart too, for year by year the old master grew more and more strange and absent in his mind. The neighbours nodded their heads when the parson's sermons seemed confused, and when he made slips in the service.

"He's thinking about his son," they said; "his mind's going."

The neighbours were right. Slowly but surely the old parson's mind was going.

At home he would sit for hours lost in thought, heeding not Janet, who tried to coax him out of his reverie, or to

tempt him to the table with the old Scotch dishes she could cook so well, which once the master had relished so much.

It was sad and weary work for the good soul as the years went by, and the dear old master grew daily more feeble, more absent-minded, and more lost in the past. His white face, watching from the window for the son that never came, grew a familiar sight to the folks of Audrey End, and the children coming home from school would look askance as they passed the house, for it was whispered that the parson was "queer" and "odd," and "not right," and the little ones, catching the whispered remarks, grew to look upon the minister as something uncanny, and to be avoided.

At last the talk of the strangeness of Parson Rayne spread in wider circles, and all the county heard it, and the gossips at the village ale-house carried the story from place to place, with ever-growing additions, until the old minister of Audrey End was known far and near as the Mad Parson.

Janet heard it in the village on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, and she shuddered. She had hidden the worst from herself. She had tried to think that she was mistaken, that the master was only fretting and absent-minded, but now everybody saw it she could be blind no longer. What would they do with the poor dear if he went quite out of his mind? They would take him away to some horrible place, where strangers would be cruel to him, and he would end his days in misery—a prisoner, tended by harsh keepers!

Old Janet hurried out of the shop where the thoughtless words had been spoken, and her eyes were red and swollen when she reached the Parsonage. She had known for months what must be the end, and yet she had never realised it as she did now.

For months the Rev. Eric Rayne had not officiated. The

curate had done all the work latterly, and hard work it was, for the church at Audrey End was the church for half-adozen outlying hamlets, and visiting the parishioners meant a considerable amount of physical exertion.

The curate was a good-hearted, manly young fellow, and he never shirked the extra work that fell upon him. He came to the Parsonage every day to see how the old gentleman was, and always had a kindly, cheery word for him. But of late he, too, had begun to look grave and to shake his head. When Janet came back from the village, the curate was with her master.

The old gentleman raised his head as Janet entered, and he looked at her eagerly, with a strange light in his generally dull eyes.

"Ha!" he exclaimed; "it's not Eric. I thought it was. He'll come to-night."

Janet looked at the curate for advice.

"Humour him," he whispered. "I don't like his appearance at all."

"What are you whispering for?" exclaimed the old gentleman fiercely, half rising in his easy-chair. "I tell you Eric is coming to-night—over the seas—thousands of miles my Eric is coming to-night. Janet, take me to the window. I'll watch for him."

The arm-chair was wheeled to the window, and the passing villagers saw the white face of the old parson still watching—watching with eager eyes for the boy that was to come back at last.

The curate, bidding Janet not leave her master alone, for this new fancy boded no good, gave a last glance at the motionless figure in the great bow-window, and stole softly out, for he had a cross-country journey to

make to an outlying farmhouse ere his day's work was done.

The grey shadows deepened over the snow-clad country, and the labourers coming from the farms passed onward to the village in the gloaming—home to their wives and children.

And never a one but as he passed looked up at the bow-window and muttered a kindly word of sympathy as he saw in the twilight the white face of the old parson pressed to the window-pane, and watching for his boy to come out of the darkness that had fallen on Audrey Hill.

Old Janet busied herself with preparations for the morrow, but the tears trickled down her furrowed cheeks as she hung the holly in the hall. Where would her poor old master spend his next Christmas?

That was the thought that harassed Scotch Janet, and made her so wretched that she set to and scolded the little village girl who had come in to help with the housework, and nearly frightened the child out of her wits.

Janet was sorry directly afterwards, and loaded the child with good things and caresses.

" Janet!"

It was the master's voice. Janet heard it, for she had left the sitting-room door ajar while she was in the kitchen.

She found the old parson still by the window, but the darkness had fallen upon the world without, and he could watch the London road no longer.

"Janet," he said feebly, "put me by the fire; I'm going to sleep. Wake me when Master Eric comes. He'll come to night; he'll come to-night!"

Old Janet's lip trembled as she wheeled her master's

chair in front of the fire, drew the red curtains across the window, and lit the lamp.

"Yes, dearie," she said, soothingly. "Maybe he will—

maybe he will."

"See, Janet!" exclaimed Parson Rayne, lifting his arm, and pointing with his trembling finger to the picture of the golden-haired boy that hung above the mantelshelf. "That's my Eric. Do you remember him, Janet? It's a hundred years since he went away."

Janet said never a word, but went out of the room, lest her full heart should overflow, and her master should see her grief.

Parson Rayne sat back in his easy chair, with his hands folded across his breast, and his eyes fixed upon little Eric—his Eric, his blue-eyed, golden-haired boy that was coming home to-night.

Gradually his eyes closed, and a deep sleep came upon him.

The clock ticked on, and still he slept. In his sleep he muttered "Eric" now and again, for the child had passed from the painter's inanimate canvas to the living canvas of his brain, and in his dream he sat with the laughing boy upon his knee.

Old Janet stole softly in and out, and, finding her master asleep, would not disturb him.

It was about seven o'clock when a gentle knock came at the door.

Janet opened it quietly, lest she should disturb the parson.

There were three persons standing in the darkness—a gentleman, a lady, and a little boy.

The gentleman was the young curate.

"Let us speak with you alone, Mistress Janet," he said. "Where is the vicar?"

"In the sitting-room, asleep," answered Janet, wondering what visitors the curate had brought so late at night.

The curate held the door open, and motioned to the lady to follow him. And Janet, astonished, led the way to the kitchen.

Janet started when the little group stood in the light, and she saw the face of the little boy, who clung timidly to the lady's dress.

She rubbed her eyes, and then, with a white face and staring eyes, fell upon her knees. "Is it a wraith," she cried, "that you've brought with you to-night, or have my old eyes seen one face in memory so long that every child's face seems like it?"

"Hush, Janet," said the young clergyman; "it is a strange story which this lady has to tell. I met her in the village, asking her way here. This little one is the lost Eric's son; this lady is his wife."

"And he—my bonny bairn—where is he?" cried Janet, seizing the lady's hand. "Say he's waiting out yonder for his faither to forgive him—say he's there! Ye do not speak—tell me where he is! Oh, my bairn—my bonny bairn—say he's there!"

The lady lifted her veil, and Janet saw that her beautiful face was wet with tears.

"Alas," she said with a little sob, "my husband is dead!"

Old Janet sat back in her chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"Listen, Janet," said the lady, rising, and taking the old servant's hand gently in hers; "listen, my good Janet. Eric has told me of you—how you were more than a mother to him. For you I have his dying message, and almost his dying kiss; the last one that he gave me is for his father."

"Dead!" sobbed Janet, rocking herself to and fro. "Dead! and the maister has hoped on all these weary years, and I have hoped too. And we'll never see him again this side o' the grave. Oh, my bairn—my bonny bairn!".

"I come to-night with a message from him, with the last words his lips ever uttered," whispered the lady. "I have come over leagues of water, from a far-off land, to tell Eric's father how, dying, he blessed him and prayed for him. It was when his last illness was upon him that he told me for the first time the story of his parting with his father."

"Why did he never write—why did he never write?" cried Janet, still with her apron to her eyes.

"He would not. He swore that his father should never see or hear of him again. It was wicked and cruel. Had I known it, it should never have been. On his deathbed his pride broke down, the old memories of home conquered, and with his dying breath he bade me bring my child to England and place him on his grandfather's knee."

Mrs. Rayne lifted her child upon her own knee as she spoke, loosed the wrapper from his throat, and took his little hat off, and, as she did so, a shower of golden curls fell over the boy's shoulders.

The clergyman started, and Janet's red eyes were fixed upon the child as though he were a vision.

"It's my bairn," she murmured; "it's my bairn. Ye ha' seen the picture in the sitting-room, sir; is it not my bonny bairn himsel'?"

"The likeness is marvellous," answered the clergyman, looking intently at the child—"most marvellous. He might have stepped from the canvas."

Then Janet told Eric's widow how the parson was asleep, and how his mind was wandering all through greeting after the boy, and how he had said that his Eric would come that night.

'The young clergyman sat for a moment in deep thought-He was wondering how best to break the news of the son's death to the old parson—how best to tell him that beneath his roof were the wanderer's widow and child.

"Gie the bairn to me," said Janet, taking little Eric in her arms and kissing him passionately, "and bide ye here. I'll do it mysel'."

Mrs. Rayne consented to Janet's proposition, and bade the child not be frightened, but go with the kind lady and see his grandpa.

Little Eric had heard of the poor grandpa he was coming to see, and many a time, as the great ship ploughed its way across the Atlantic, the child had asked when it would be England, where grandpa lived.

So, kissing his little hand to his mother, he let Janet carry him tenderly in her loving arms into the sitting-room where grandpa was asleep.

Softly the old servant crept in with her precious burden in her arms; and as her eyes sought eagerly the picture of little Eric above the mantelpiece she stooped and pressed a fervent kiss upon the little one's rosy lips, for the father lived again in the son.

Parson Rayne still slept. Gently Janet placed the little boy beside his knee, and bade him not speak till grandpapa woke. Then she sat herself down by the fire, as she used to do in the days when her Eric was a little one, and her old voice piped out in a sweet mellow tone an old Scotch song that had been a favourite with the child.

Presently the minister muttered as if in his sleep. The words of the old familiar song were flooding across his brain, working themselves into his troubled dream, as external sounds will at times.

"Sing to him, Janet," he murmured; "sing to him. Sing to Eric."

The boy looked up at hearing his name, and gently touched his grandfather's hand. Slowly the heavy lids were lifted, and the eyes looked down.

For one moment the old parson seemed dazed, then he raised his trembling hands and rubbed his eyes, and looked in wonder at the child who stood beside his knee.

"My Eric!" he cried, lifting the child up and clasping him to his breast. "My Eric—at last! at last!"

Then the tears flowed fast from his eyes, and, burying his face in the boy's golden curls, he sobbed like a child.

Eric, frightened, gave a little cry.

"My darling, my boy!" said the old parson, lifting his head; "you are my Eric, are you not? I have been dreaming—a bad, dreadful dream. I dreamt you were grown to be a man, and had left your poor old father to die. But you are Eric; aren't you? Speak—speak! Let me hear that it is not some vision come to mock me!"

"My name is Eric Rayne," whimpered the child. "Are you my gan'pa?"

"Grandpa!"

For a moment the old man sat and said no word, with his

trembling hand upon the child's head, and glanced upward at the picture above the mantelpiece.

Janet, who had stood a silent spectator of the scene, came quietly forward.

"Maister," she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder; "this is our bairn's bairn. His father has sent him across the sea to you. You said your Eric would come to-night. God sends you this one, and is he not Eric? Is he not the blue-eyed, golden-haired bairn his father was?"

The old parson's white face was flushed with emotion, and his old eyes were bright. The sudden joy, the strange meeting, had aroused the long torpid brain. Gradually the truth dawned upon him.

"I know now," he said softly. "My Eric is dead; this is his son."

Gently old Janet crept from the room, and left the child and the old man together.

That night all was told. That night the old parson, the impending veil lifted from his reason, heard from the lips of his daughter-in-law the strange story of Eric Rayne's flight from home, and subsequent life.

Edith Rayne told how she had met Eric in America; and how it had been a love match. She knew that he was an Englishman, and no more. Soon after their marriage they went to California, and there her husband made money in a mining adventure which had since become world-famous.

There little Eric was born, and there her husband was seized with the illness which proved fatal to him.

"On his death-bed," said sweet Edith Rayne, "Eric told me all. He told me of his fierce last quarrel with you; and how, in his pride, he had never repented the vow he made that you should hear of him no more. But lying there, knowing that the end was near, his heart melted, and he yearned to see you again, and crave your forgiveness.

"'Take little Eric, Edith,' he whispered; 'take the child when I am gone, and go to England to the village where my father's house is, and tell him that I died blessing him and asking his forgiveness.'

"Then he had the little one lifted up to him, and kissed him, bidding him carry that kiss across the sea to his grandpapa, and say that Eric sent it."

Edith Rayne, as she spoke, lifted her boy on to his grandfather's knee, and the lips of the child and the old man met.

* * * * *

It is summer, and the roses bloom about the porch of the old Parsonage that stands upon the London road.

The air is full of the scent of flowers, and the dusty road is flooded with golden sunlight.

Pressed against the great bow-window of the Parsonage is a face familiar to all the countryside. It is the face of old Parson Rayne, but it is not the white, drawn face of old; the cheeks are tull and pink, and the lips are parted in a smile.

Parson Rayne is watching the top of Audrey Hill. He is watching for Eric, and he does not watch in vain. Bareheaded, his golden curls dancing in the sunlight, the little one comes running towards the house, his little hands full of flowers which the cottagers have given him.

And behind him, walking more sedately, comes sweet Edith Rayne, his mother.

Then grandpa hurries to the gate, and lifts the lad up and kisses him; and presently the old house rings with childish laughter and the clatter of little feet.

It is a happy home now, and old Janet is quite contented to hand over the keys to the sweet lady who has brought sunshine to it from across the seas, and is a daughter to the old master who for eight long years was childless.

Eric is dead; but Eric's wife and Eric's son came one Christmas Eve out of the haze that hung over Audrey Hill, and with them came reason and happiness once more to old Parson Rayne.

No. V.

MISS HESSELTINE'S HUSBAND.

"HERE he comes, Clare! Good-night, dear Thank you so much."

"Oh, Maud, he is handsome!"

Miss Clare Weston was so enchanted with the appearance of the dark gentleman who had just approached them, and raised his hat in the purest Parisian style, that for a moment she quite forgot she was *de trop*, and that her part of the conspiracy was at an end.

It was a conspiracy undoubtedly, and it was very wrong, but it was very nice and romantic, and Clare Weston had entered into the plot heart and soul.

Maud Hesseltine was her bosom friend; what more natural than, when Maud received her first wound from Cupid's dart, she should make Clare her confidant?

Clare was very useful to Maud, for Cupid, as is the young gentleman's wont, had not been particularly circumspect in his archery, and Maud, the only daughter of a wealthy London banker, had fallen madly in love with a handsome Frenchman who met her for the first time on the Lees at Folkestone.

Miss Hesseltine, a spoiled and petted only child, romantic to the tips of her finger nails, and impressionable to a degree, had taken fire like touchwood from the sparks of admiration which the keen black eye of the good-looking foreigner shot at her as he passed and repassed on the promenade.

Gradually the dark stranger became the central figure in her monotonous existence at the English watering-place. She blushed if she met him accidentally in the streets, she began to look forward to the evening promenade on the Lees with feverish impatience, and she could almost hear her own heart beat as she recognised him among the crowd, and caught his beautiful eye fixed upon her face.

She had been accustomed to walk with papa and mamma, but now she feared lest they should observe her tell-tale face, and discover the cause of it.

She left papa and mamma to enjoy their promenade together, and developed a sudden desire for Clare Weston's society. Clare was staying at Folkestone too, and it was the luckiest thing in the world. Clare entered heart and soul into Maud's romance; and the girls together, at a respectful distance from the parental eye, would stroll up and down the Lees, meeting Maud's hero at every turn.

One evening, as they were sitting on a seat, the French gentleman came up, and, seeing a vacant seat next them, dropped into it.

What more natural than that he should apologise in French, and make a commonplace remark?

Maud spoke French beautifully. Her parents had lived in the Rue St. Honoré three whole months in order that she might acquire the accent.

What more natural than that she should reply, and that Clare should venture presently, when it grew into a conversation, to drop in an occasional "oui" and "non"?

Maud, from answering the Frenchman's cursory remarks, on the weather, the sea, and Folkestone generally, grew

gradually bold, and at last went so far as to say, in a sweet voice—

"Aimez-vous l'Angleterre, m'sieu?"

That was quite enough for the Parisian. In a moment he launched out into a rhapsody upon Albion, and especially upon Albion's daughters; and the conversation was just getting interesting when Clare, looking up, saw Mr. and Mrs. Hesseltine approaching, and gave Maud a friendly and warning nudge.

The two girls rose hastily, and blushed and bowed. The Frenchman rose too, and raised his hat, and just as the young ladies moved away he whispered—

"Demain ici à sept heures."

And before Maud and Clare could recover from their confusion he was gone.

Of course Maud declared that she wouldn't keep the appointment, and asked Clare what she should do, and Clare thought there could be no harm in just seeing what the gentleman would say.

"I wouldn't go alone, dear; but, if I am with you, there really can be no harm in it."

What could Maud say to that? Nothing. She determined that she would not keep the appointment, and she mentally patted herself on the back for being so prudent and so brave; and of course, at seven o'clock the next evening, by the merest accident, she and Clare found themselves on the very identical seat.

After that the rest is easy to foresee. The French gentleman made another appointment with the young ladies in a less public place, and they kept it. Maud and Clare went for long walks together in the afternoon along the cliffs and out into the country, and always by the merest

accident they met the French gentleman, who was such an agreeable companion, and who made no secret of his admiration for Miss Hesseltine.

He was so nice and polite—such a perfect gentleman—and he had the most romantic history. He had confided it to the two girls, and Maud's beautiful eyes had filled with tears. The French language lent such a charm to his narrative that the girls were quite carried away by it; and Clare confessed afterwards that, had she loved her darling Maud less, she would have loved the Frenchman more.

M. le Vicomte De Longueville had been compelled to fly from France through political troubles. Devotedly attached to the Bonapartist cause, he had not hesitated to conspire for the return of the young Prince. For this he had been arrested, and had with difficulty escaped and found shelter in England. His beautiful mansion in Paris had been confiscated by the Republic, and his glorious château on the Loire was also in the hands of the enemy. But he had powerful friends in the Republican ranks, and at any moment he might be reinstated in his rights.

"Ah, M. le Vicomte," exclaimed Clare, when he had finished. "Je vous ——"

But the Vicomte held up his hand deprecatingly. "Do not call me vicomte, madam," he said gently; "for the present I am simply M. Victor Legard. The Republican spies are everywhere. These men are merciless. For political reasons I am not safe even here in your free England, so that I must conceal my identity."

Maud sighed. How brave, how noble, of the Vicomte to have sacrificed himself for the exiled Bonapartists!

M. Victor Legard, as he preferred to be called, was not slow to see the impression he had made on the young

English girl. She had told him in the most innocent manner all about herself—how her papa was a wealthy banker in London, and how she was his only daughter. She did not wish the Vicomte to imagine that perhaps she was an ordinary tradesman's daughter, and not in the same rank of life as himself.

The handsome Frenchman made the most respectful love to the beautiful English heiress, and Maud surrendered herself to the intoxication of the most romantic episode in her hitherto monotonous existence.

Clare was the dearest, nicest friend in the world. She invited Maud to spend the day with her, and even took her maid into her confidence; so that when that young person was sent to accompany the young ladies after dark to Maud's house, she made no remark when, instead of going there, she and Miss Clare left Miss Hesseltine on the Lees with the handsome Frenchman.

It had gone as far as that.

Maud was engaged—secretly engaged to the Vicomte. She had promised that she would know no other love, and that when his affairs were settled, and his property restored, she would tell her papa all, and Victor should come boldly and claim her as his affanced wife.

Maud was one-and-twenty, and her own mistress, and she told Victor so; but of course it would be much better that by-and-by he should come to her papa as a nobleman and make a formal offer for her hand. It would be so much better for them both.

Victor was quite of Maud's opinion; and when he bade her good-night close to her house, and kissed her, and called her his little wife that was to be, Maud felt how lucky she was to have found so handsome and so honourable a lover. She dared not tell her parents anything about Victor yet, for he was an exile, and his property had been taken from him; but directly he had regained his lost position, then her papa and mamma should know everything.

On the evening that Clare left her friend on the Lees, and the Frenchman's handsome face wrung from her lips the compliment with which she was first introduced to the reader, Victor confided a secret to his betrothed.

He was agitated, and spoke rapidly. "Maud, my darling," he said, speaking in his own language; "those wretched Republicans have dogged me here. I must fly!"

Maud's face went white, and her limbs trembled.

"Oh, my darling!" exclaimed her lover, passionately. "I do not ask you to fly with me; but I cannot—I will not—leave you like this. Let me at least know that you are my wife."

"Victor!"

"Listen, my angel. Thinking that some day I might have to leave you suddenly, I had taken precautions. Three weeks ago I went to London and gave notice to the registrar, and arranged everything. All is in order. Tomorrow we can be married civilly. You will be my wife, and no one need know. I will leave you outside the registrar's office. When I return I shall return as the Vicomte De Longueville, and then I will claim you as my wife, and lead you to the altar for the religious ceremony. Maud, my darling, will you not consent?"

For a time Maud wavered. But her romantic heart was given to the man. The very suddenness and strangeness of the proposal lent it a charm in her eyes. At last she faltered out her consent, and her lover caught her in his arms and smothered her with kisses.

He arranged it all. Nothing was simpler.

Clare must be her confidant.

Early to-morrow Clare must call for Maud to spend the day with her. She would come to the station, and he would meet her there. They would leave by the quarter-past nine train, and be at the registrar's soon after eleven. Then she could return to Folkestone at once. She could be in her own home again the same afternoon.

That night Maud Hesseltine never closed her eyes. Should she, or should she not? It was a desperate step she was about to take. It was secret, and it might be wrong. No; she could trust her Victor. Besides, when she was a vicountess, papa would be as pleased as anyone. Once she was half inclined to get up there and then, and tell her mother everything; but when the light came, she rose and dressed herself, and prepared to carry out her promise to Victor.

The quarter-past nine London express had among its first-class passengers Miss Maud Hesseltine and M. Victor Legard. The train which arrived at Folkestone at five that afternoon carried only Madame Legard.

Victor had been true to his word, and had parted with his wife.

But the parting had not taken place as arranged. When the ceremony was over, Victor walked with his young wife towards the station.

He hesitated to leave her.

"You are my wife now," he whispered. "Love is a tyrant, and will not be said nay. Oh, Maud, my darling, will you—can you—leave me thus? A line to your father will allay his anxiety if you do not return."

Maud trembled, and could hardly speak. The whole

import of the rash step she had taken was revealed to her now.

"Victor," she murmured, "you promised you would leave me. But for your promise I would never have consented."

The Frenchman smiled.

"You are my wife, ma chère, now," he said, showing his white teeth, "and I have altered my mind. I love you too well to leave you. Come, we will go to your father together—shall we?—and tell him all. You will introduce his son-in-law to him."

"No—no!" gasped Maud, now really terrified; "I cannot do that. Oh, Victor, this is cruel! You promised you would not claim me until your estates were restored."

"Ah! did you marry me for my estates?"

"Oh, Victor!" cried Maud, her lip trembling, and her eyes filling with tears. "You are doing this to try my love—to tease me, are you not? Go, now; let me go home."

Miss Hesseltine's husband slipped his arm in hers, and was about to reply.

At that moment he looked across the street. There was no one there but a tall, military-looking old gentleman, with a shaven face. The man was smoking a cigarette, and apparently looking at nothing in particular.

Victor's manner altered in a moment.

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed, dropping Maud's arm. "I was wrong. I will keep my promise. Good-bye!"

Without another word, without a kiss, he vanished as if by magic, and Maud Hesseltine, as astonished at the abruptness of the parting as she had been by his changed manner after the ceremony, found herself at liberty to return to Folkestone alone, with a wedding-ring in her pocket, and a secret in her heart which made her more wretched than she had ever been in her life.

* * * * *

All Paris was ringing with the capture and trial of a notorious criminal—a young man who for a long time had eluded justice.

Four years ago, under the cruellest possible circumstances, a young man, named Paul Guerin, had murdered the wife of his employer, believing that she had about her a large sum of money. Madame Retz was the wife of a money-lender who travelled about the country, as his clients were farmers and small shopkeepers. Paul Guerin was their clerk, and lived on the premises. Handsome, and of superior manners, Paul had many temptations to lead a gayer life than his means afforded, and at last, harassed by debt, and involved in many ways, he determined to get a large sum of money and quit the country.

One morning, during the absence of M. Retz, the office, remaining closed, was broken into by the neighbours, and Madame was found in a senseless condition. She recovered sufficiently to say that Paul Guerin had been her assailant, and then spoke no more. An examination revealed the fact that the poor woman had been mercilessly beaten about the head with some heavy instrument.

The money which she was supposed to carry about her was found under her mattress, and Paul, who had disappeared, had evidently only secured a small sum which he had taken from the cash-box, which was found forced open.

From that day for nearly four years nothing was heard of him. He was a gentlemanly-looking fellow, and it was surmised that he had gone to America, and was probably earning a living by swindling. M. Retz declared that he had seen him once when he was in London some time after the commission of the crime, but he had vanished in a moment. He knew him by his eyes, the moustache and whiskers which he had grown since having much altered him.

Now he had been captured in Spain by the merest accident, brought to Paris, and condemned to the guillotine. At the trial he preserved the most obstinate silence; he would say nothing of how he had spent the interval between his flight and capture.

The trial was a celebrated case, and the French journals vied with each other in their attempts to make capital out of it. The ladies especially took great interest in the proceedings, for the criminal was young and handsome. Photographs of him were exhibited in some of the shops in the passages, and M. Paul Guerin divided the honours of publicity with the Veuve Daubigny, who had just blinded her aristocratic lover by throwing vitriol in his eyes because he attempted to throw dust in hers, while he made handsome presents to a fair fleuriste in the Boulevard St. Michel.

Some weeks after the conclusion of the trial, and when the prisoner's appeal for mercy had been considered and refused, and the date fixed for the execution, an English family arrived in Paris by the morning mail. They were met at the station by a young English doctor practising in Paris, an old friend of the family, and, if gossip was correct, once a sweetheart of the daughter.

Young Dr. Allison had known the Hesseltines in London, and it was the Hesseltines he went to the Gare du Nord to meet.

Gossip was quite correct. He had been in love with

Maud before he came to Paris. He had stayed at the Hesseltines' house when in London, and he had old Hesseltine's heartiest wishes for his success.

But Maud, pale and trembling when the offer was made to her, refused it at once.

"It can never be, Dr. Allison," she said—" never!"

The doctor took her answer like a gentleman, and left London with a heavy heart.

And Maud, her foolish romance long since dead, wept bitter tears up in her own room to think how in her mad folly she had bound herself to a man who had left her outside the registrar's office, and of whom she had never heard since.

Over and over again her secret became almost more than she could bear, and she determined to tell her father, and risk his wrath; but then the thought that the inquiry set on foot might lead to some terrible discovery as to the real character of her husband would force itself upon her, and she determined to hold her peace.

But the anxiety and the burden of her secret together were telling upon her health, and when she found out that in her heart she could really love the man whose offer she had been compelled to refuse, she broke down altogether.

So the time went on, and at last Maud's condition grew so serious that the family doctor ordered travel and excitement. The girl was simply moping herself to death.

"Let us take her to Paris," said her mother. "I'm sure the best thing we can do is to bring Maud and Dr. Allison together again. She's never been the same since she cefused him."

To Paris the Hesseltines went accordingly, and Dr. Allison met them at the station.

In the evening he called at their apartments in the Rue St. Honoré to see how Maud had borne the journey.

The conversation turned upon what was going on in Paris, and the doctor told them all about the Guerin trial, and how the man had that morning been guillotined at La Roquette.

- "Four years after the crime was committed!" exclaimed Mr. Hesseltine. "Ah, murder will out!"
- "What a horrid wretch he must have been!" said the banker's wife.
- "No, indeed, he was not at all horrid," answered the doctor; "he was a remarkably handsome man, and his manners were perfect. I bought his photograph this morning for my collection. I believe I have it in my pocket now."

The doctor drew some papers from his breast pocket, and selected an envelope from among them. Opening it, he drew out a carte-de-visite, and handed it to Mrs. Hesseltine.

"Well, he really is a handsome fellow!" said the old lady. "Whoever would think he was a murderer? But I'm sure I've seen the face somewhere before."

Maud had come up to her mother's chair, and she looked at the photograph over her shoulder.

Then her face went deathly white, her eyes closed, and, with a sharp cry, she fell forward into the doctor's outstretched arms.

She had swooned.

The man who had been guillotined at La Roquette that morning was the man whom she had last seen outside the registrar's office. Paul Guerin was the man whom she had known as Victor Legard, Vicomte de Longueville.

The murderer of Madame Retz was Miss Hesseltine's husband!

* * * * *

"Oh, Maud, I ask you again! Bid me at least hope. I cannot think you meant it when you refused me before. Maud, my darling, be my wife!"

Maud Hesseltine turned her face, with a sweet smile on it, to Dr. Allison.

"Yes," she answered; "I think I have changed my mind."

"God bless you, Maud!" answered the doctor, folding her in his arms; and the rest was silence.

"I told you, my dear, if we brought her to Paris, it would put her right," said Mrs. Hesseltine to her husband that afternoon; "I knew if she saw him again she wouldn't say no."

Mrs. Hesseltine congratulated herself on her diplomacy, but she little thinks that it was not only her future husband's face her daughter saw again in Paris.

And Dr. Allison, when long afterwards with his young wife he drives past La Roquette, has no idea that there is any special reason why Maud turns her head away and shudders.

Maud Hesseltine flung her wedding-ring into the Seine the day after she saw Paul Guerin's photograph, and she will carry her ghastly secret to the grave with her.

No. VI.

A STRANGE JOURNEY.

OLD Mr. Twemlow was dead.

He had saved his last sixpence, scraped his last rind of cheese so thin that you could see through it, his grasping hand had ceased to clutch the money bags that were dearer than life to him, and his covetous eyes were too fast shut ever to gloat over the golden drops that to him were the sweetest fruit upon the Tree of Life.

He had driven his relatives from his door, he had shut himself in a tumbledown house at the East-end, which was his property, and which he was too mean to repair. When the last tenant left, and no other could be found to put up with broken windows, dirty walls, and a roof that had two slates broken for every whole one, Mr. Twemlow became his own tenant, as the only solution of the difficulty, and he ended his miserable life in squalor and discomfort, denying himself almost the necessaries of life at a time when, in cash and securities, he was worth more than a hundred thousand pounds.

Down in the dirty little side street where he lived the later years of his life, he was known as Daddy Twemlow, and local gossip represented his wealth as fabulous.

His bent figure and sallow, withered face were familiar to all the rude boys of the district, and when Daddy went out on his errands he had to run the gauntlet of their merciless chaff.

Mr. Twemlow did not live alone. The kitchen floor of

the tumbledown tenement was occupied by an old Irishwoman, Mrs. Bridget Maloney, whom the old man dignified by the name of housekeeper.

Bridget was almost as wretched a specimen of humanity as her master, but her tastes were kindred ones, and so she suited the place admirably. Bridget took no wages; she had the kitchen floor rent free, and Mr. Twemlow provided her with food from his own table. And pretty food it was. The cheapest meat from the cheapest butcher's in the parish, mouldy cheese, stale bread; in short, the items on the Twemlow menu were of the most beggarly description imaginable.

For this self-denial Bridget believed that she would one day reap a rich reward. The old man was getting childish; he kept aloof from his relatives. As he grew more niggardly every day, he would in due course starve himself to death, and then Bridget would have all his money.

He had promised it her a hundred times when they sat in the dark to save the candle, and walked up and down and talked to keep themselves warm.

"But what about yer nevvy, master?" asked Bridget one night when Mr. Twemlow had again assured her she was his sole legatee.

"Drat my nephew!" answered the old gentleman; "do you think I could rest easy in my grave with that emptyheaded fool making ducks and drakes of everything? No, Bridget, I've left it all to you; you'll take care of it—you won't touch a penny of it, will you?"

"No, master."

Doubtless Mr. Twemlow believed his housekeeper spoke the truth, but one day a circumstance happened which changed his views with regard to the disposal of his property.

He read, in a piece of newspaper which had been wrapped round his latest investment in cheap cheese, an account of an old woman who had poisoned her master in order to come into the fortune he had left her in his will at an earlier date than Providence seemed likely to fix.

From that moment he became suspicious of Bridget, and he let her know that he had altered his mind, and was going to make a fresh will. He should leave all his money to his nephew.

Bridget's face was as long as a halfpenny kite.

But her master reassured her.

"Only on this condition, Bridget," he said. "This day five years I'll tear up the will in his favour, and the one I've made leaving everything to you will stand."

Now the difficulty was to get a will drawn up without expense, but Mr. Twemlow was equal to the occasion.

He went across to the little stationer's, where forms of will were sold for sixpence each, and he got one for nothing, and the signature of the little stationer as a witness, too, on the same terms. That is, he didn't part with the sixpence, but agreed to leave the struggling tradesman five pounds in his will instead, which magnanimous offer was accepted, and Bridget and the stationer duly witnessed the will.

"Bridget," said Mr. Twemlow that afternoon, "I'm not going to buy any more food myself. It doesn't much matter to me if I die, but it does to you. If you keep me alive for another five years, you'll have a hundred thousand pounds!"

Bridget thought it was a joke at first, but she found it

was nothing of the sort. The old man knew she had a little hoard of her own, and, nolens volens, she had to go to it. Her master would have starved himself to death, and his nephew would have had his money, if she had refused.

And, just six months after this novel arrangement, old Mr. Twemlow, having tramped to the City to receive a dividend on a wet day, with no umbrella, and an old pair of boots that let in water, took a severe cold, and, turning his face to the damp and dirty wall, grew delirious, raved about great rocks of gold that were falling on him and crushing him, and on the fourth day gave up something which even his greedy hands could clutch no longer—the ghost.

There was an inquest on the old gentleman, and his vast wealth and eccentricities were duly paragraphed in the papers, as was also the fact that Mr. Hamilton Earle, the popular light comedian at the Royal Momus Theatre, was his heir.

Mr. Hamilton Earle had grave doubts about his luck himself when he heard of his uncle's death, for he knew the old gentleman considered him a spendthrift and all that was dreadful.

But the little stationer who was interested to the extent of five pounds called on Mr. Earle, and told him that he had witnessed the will, and had seen it within the last fortnight in the old gentleman's possession, for, on the strength of that five pounds, Mr. Twemlow had had penny bottles of ink, sheets of paper, pens, &c., as he had required them, and instead of payment had shown the little stationer the will, which he kept in an envelope in his coat pocket.

Directly the news of his uncle's decease reached him, Hamilton went to his solicitors, and ordered them to secure everything, which they did, but not before Mrs. Bridget had collected the old gentleman's wardrobe, and disposed of it at an old clothes shop, having quite made up her mind that the new will shut her out of everything.

But when the old gentleman's papers came to be searched, the only will amongst them was one which left everything to Mrs. Bridget. The little stationer declared he had witnessed another, but the question was, where had it been put?

Then Mrs. Bridget, hearing all this, came with a bold face and claimed the property. The master, in his last hours, had repented of his rashness, and torn the will up. He didn't want to see his hard-earned savings squandered by a play-actor.

Nothing could shake the old woman's story.

It was quite in accordance with the old miser's known eccentricity.

"Oh, my hundred thousand pounds!" moaned the young comedian, as his golden dream vanished into thin air.

"Oh, my five pounds!" groaned the little stationer, as he thought rucfully of the bottles of ink and receipt stamps and paper he had parted with in sublime and childlike faith.

Hamilton Earle determined to go to law about it, to dispute the will, and the case was taken up, and evidence prepared by his solicitors. It was during a careful search of the premises as a last resource, that Mr Abrahams, a smart solicitor's clerk, discovered, kicking about, an old envelope of apparently no value. He picked it up, and suddenly executed a wild can-can of delight.

There, scrawled on the inside of the envelope, was a memorandum in the old man's writing:—

"Mem. to executor-Will sewn inside waistcoat."

The whole thing was evident in a moment. The old

gentleman, with the suspicion of his class, had mistrusted his housekeeper when he became ill, and had concealed the will in the way mentioned. There was no doubt he had never intended to leave the woman his money, but had prepared the first will in order to induce her to take no wages.

Having perused this precious document, the next thing was to find the waistcoat.

Mr. Twemlow's wardrobe was not likely to be extensive.

A cautious inquiry elicited the fact that the old gentleman had been wearing an old blue waistcoat with gilt buttons, and also that immediately after the old gentleman's decease Mrs. Bridget had disposed of his clothes.

Mr. Abrahams rushed off to his employers for instructions. Mr. Hamilton Earle was communicated with, and the result of the conference was short and simple.

The waistcoat must be traced and recovered at any cost.

That afternoon Hamilton, who was fortunately out of an engagement, registered a vow never to pause in his search until he had recovered the valuable garment.

The first step was to call at the shop where Bridget had struck her bargain.

Hamilton and Mr. Abrahams went together.

Result—a facer—grief at the first hurdle.

The marine store dealer recollected the articles well. They were very old, and worth but little. Remembered 'em, because, being old Daddy Twemlow's, they were rather curiosities. Coat wasn't worth a rap. Waistcoat was the best; it was old-fashioned—blue, and gilt buttons."

Yes, exactly; but where was it?

Young Mr. Earle waited eagerly for a reply.

Well, the marine store dealer, not having any call for old

clothes himself, generally sold 'em again—a lot together. Mr. Twemlow's suit was sold about a month ago to a wholesale dealer in the City. His address? Certainly. His address was Dash-street, Minories.

Hansom! Dash-street, Minories.

Tearing along the main thoroughfares, darting round corners, scattering children and shaving old ladies and gentlemen by a hair's breadth, away flew the hansom, and landed the two gentlemen in due time at the required number in Dash-street, Minories.

Inquiries there long and tedious. Too wholesale to remember details. Cross-examination of clerks—reward offered—papers of no value except to owner, &c.—searching of invoices, daybooks, &c. Ultimate result: the goods purchased in parcel from said marine store dealer, put in to complete big order for Liverpool dealer.

Liverpool!

Mr. Earle and his assistant drew a long breath. Liverpool! Well, it was growing desperate. Still, a hundred thousand pounds was at stake! That night the last train for Liverpool that rattled out of Euston-square had among its passengers the young comedian of the Momus and Mr. Abrahams, the solicitor's clerk.

The next morning, soon after nine, pale and anxious, Hamilton Earle followed Abrahams into the big dealer's office.

Mr. Abrahams being a man of business, and more guarded than his employer's client, it was agreed that he should conduct the inquiry.

"The consignment of old clothes received from the Minories merchant, was it in the warehouse? The gentleman wished to know, as a paper of no value except to the owner, &c."

Head clerk politeness itself. Would make inquiry. Did so, and returned with a smile.

"Sorry to say, consignment in question was for a shipping order for the colonies. Had left for West Coast of Africa, per ss. Albatross."

The West Coast of Africa!

"We must telegraph at once," said Mr. Abrahams, "and have the consignment searched for a blue waistcoat with gilt buttons."

"Perhaps the gilt buttons have been taken off, and the consignee wouldn't recognise it," suggested Mr. Earle.

Mr. Abrahams saw the difficulty; still, what was to be done? They could hardly follow the old clothes to the West Coast of Africa.

Hamilton Earle considered for a moment; then he slapped his thigh.

"By Jove, Abrahams!" he exclaimed, "I'll do it."

"Do what?"

"Go after the waistcoat. If I catch the mail direct I shall beat the Liverpool ship now, and it's a hundred thousand pounds, you know."

They talked the matter over with Mr. Earle's solicitors. At present, Mrs. Bridget's claim was really indisputable. The memorandum on the piece of paper as to a will in the waistcoat was undated and unsigned, and there was no proof to offer the law that old Mr. Twemlow had not done as Bridget declared—torn the new will up at the last moment.

"And really, you know," added the head of the firm, "it is quite possible she is telling the truth. I should advise you, before you undertake this strange journey, Mr. Earle, to remember that there is no absolute proof there is a will in the lining of the waistcoat."

Hamilton Earle was young, ardent, sanguine, and enthusiastic. The idea of possessing this huge fortune dazzled him. He would leave no stone unturned to secure it. He was perfectly certain that the scrap of paper was a providential revelation, and that, if he could only secure the waistcoat, the will, duly signed and witnessed, would be his.

He knew the waistcoat well.

It was one that his uncle used to wear, and be very proud of in the days before he grew such a confirmed miser. The idea of the voyage fascinated him; there was something romantic about the whole affair—and there was a hundred thousand pounds at the end of it.

Nothing could turn him from his determination. He would follow in the track of the Albatross, and pursue his will-o'-the-wisp fortune over the leagues of stormy water, even to the deadly coast of West Africa.

The next mail left in three days.

As the good ship Elephant and Castle steamed out of the docks, young Mr. Abrahams waved his hat, and shouted "Good luck!"

And the gentleman who returned his cheer from the deck of the vessel was Mr. Hamilton Earle.

* * * * ;

The Elephant and Castle experienced some very bad weather. Many a time and oft during the stormy voyage did the young comedian of the Momus wish himself safe on the boards of the theatre. The boards of the steamer gave him a foothold far less secure.

Once he thought it was all over with him, and he wished his uncle's will at the devil. But as the good ship neared her destination the elements grew more propitious, and Mr.

Hamilton Earle made his first appearance on the West Coast sound in wind and limb, and just a fortnight overdue.

The goods among which was the valuable blue waistcoat had been consigned to a firm in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is not calculated to inspirit a gentleman from London all at once. The peninsula has a few tracts of fertile land, but the interior is rugged and wretched, the climate is humid and deadly, and the rainy season sets in early in May and lasts till November.

Mr. Hamilton Earle did not propose to settle in this promising spot, and therefore, though he strongly objected to the perpetual downpour, he didn't trouble about his health. He was far more interested in the fact that Sierra Leone exports gold, palm-oil, hides, ivory, and ground nuts, and imports in return cotton goods, gunpowder, hardware, rum, and ready-made apparel, including old clothes for the negroes. His uncle's waistcoat had come out among the ready-made apparel from the Liverpool merchants, who took palm-oil, &c., in exchange.

Hamilton soon found the address of the consignee, and proceeded to call. He saw a nigger gentleman, who gave him all the information in his power.

It wasn't much.

"Yes; de consignment from de Albatross hab come. Yes, sah; him come las' week. Good consignment, dat, by golly! All sold? Yes, sah."

Alas, it was true! Owing to the slow passage of the mail the Albatross had arrived first, and the consignment of clothes had all been disposed of a week ago.

Disappointed, disheartened, and utterly nonplussed, the young comedian sank into a chair in the office, and gave

vent to a groan which sounded suspiciously like a short but forcible anathema.

But he recovered himself in a moment. He hadn't come all this way to be beaten by a trifle.

He commenced to examine and cross-examine the black gentleman in charge of the native merchant's office.

Could he tell how the consignment had been disposed of? Who had bought the old clothes?

"Ole clo! Yes, sah—suttenly, sah. John Snagg, Esq., sah. He buy the ole clo."

Who was John Snagg, Esq.?

"Genelman ob cullah, sah-merchant. Buy anyting, John Snagg, Esq., sah."

By a slow and tedious process of elucidation, Mr. Earle at last discovered that John Snagg, Esq., was a local trader who bought up cheap lots, and travelled about the coast with them, exchanging them for the produce of the particular district in which he happened to be.

The next thing was to find John Snagg, Esq. Could the coloured gentleman give him any idea where he was likely to be?

"Ah, sah! him dam rum gent, John Snagg, Esq.—him here, dere, eberywhere—Gole Coast, Ibory Coast, Slabe Coast, Grain Coast—him eberywhere!"

This was a pleasant look-out for the comedian. He might become the Wandering Jew of the West Coast of Africa if he didn't get more precise particulars than these to guide him in the pursuit of John Snagg, Esq.

Still there was a hundred thousand pounds at stake, and he must do something.

Close inquiry satisfied him that Snagg's purchase included a blue waistcoat with gilt buttons. His negro informant

had himself helped to assort the consignment of old clothes, and the gilt buttons had made a great impression on him. Yes, it was quite certain Snagg had taken it away with him on his journey.

Before the day was out Hamilton Earle was on the track of the waistcoat once more. He ascertained of a resident European who was acquainted with Snagg that he had directed his steps to the Ivory Coast, there to barter with the natives.

Old Twemlow's will was at the present moment on its way to the Great Elephant Land.

It wasn't a nice or an easy journey that lay before the young Englishman. He procured an escort, made himself acquainted with the dangers he had to guard against, provided himself with the necessaries for the journey, and, determined not to be beaten, started once more in pursuit of the blue waistcoat with gilt buttons.

* * * * *

"Mr. Snagg, I believe?"

"Yes, sah, dat's me; John Snagg, Esq., sah!"

The young comedian had passed safely through the heart of a dangerous district. He had escaped the lions, the crocodiles, the elephants, and the two-legged wild beasts who by no means were to be despised by the European traveller; and he had by great good luck fallen into the track of the Sierra Leone trader, and come up with him at a trading station on the Ivory Coast.

After the first introduction, Hamilton Earle went straight for the blue waistcoat with gilt buttons.

Had Mr. Snagg parted with it?

Mr. Snagg had. He had exchanged it yesterday, with other goods, for ivory, to Black Jack.

Who was Black Jack?

The life story of Black Jack was at the white gentleman's service. He was the richest and most bloodthirsty negro on the coast. He was half robber, half trader, and could drink like a white man. He had kept the waistcoat for himself, and had put it on.

"At last!" exclaimed the traveller. "Now I've only to find Black Jack, and the waistcoat's mine."

For a consideration Mr. Snagg would go out of his way, retrace his steps, and take the white gentleman to Black Jack's abode. It was only a day's journey.

Mr. Earle consented to the terms. He was delighted. If there had been an hotel in the neighbourhood he would have stood champagne round. But there was nothing but a putrid swamp on one side and a mangrove jungle on the other.

It was the next afternoon when the little band reached the habitation of Black Jack. The neighbourhood of his lair was in a great commotion. Two or three dozen negroes were howling and gesticulating, and Jack, a black, ferociouslooking negro, his eyes flashing fire and his voice thick with drink, was howling louder than any.

He wanted everybody's blood.

He had got drunk on rum, had gone to sleep, and somebody had stolen his beautiful blue waistcoat with the gilt buttons. He had taken it off, and put it by his side, not to spoil it by lying on the ground on it, and now it was gone.

Black Jack in his rage was terrible, but Hamilton Earle barely glanced at him after he knew the cause of the hubbub.

He had come upon the very man who an hour ago had the precious waistcoat on, and he had come too late.

It had gone—and the will had disappeared with it.

For a few minutes the young Englishman sat silent, his head sunk upon his breast.

Presently there was a cry. "They've found de tief, sah!" exclaimed Mr. Snagg; "they're bringin' him along. Black Jack will kill him, sah."

Hamilton Earle leapt to his feet.

Yes, they were bringing a negro along—dragging him from his hiding-place to Black Jack; and the man who was leading him held in his hand—what? For a moment the young actor was dazed; he could hardly believe his eyes. The next he sprang forward with a cry of joy.

That which the negro held in his hand was Uncle Twemlow's blue waistcoat with the gilt buttons.

In an instant Hamilton Earle was in the thick of the crowd. Wild with excitement, he seized the waistcoat, and dragged it from the negro's hand. There was a wild shout, a buzzing in his ears, and sparks flying from his eyes, and then he knew no more.

Black Jack, thinking he meant to run away with the waistcoat, had felled him to the ground with the empty rum-bottle, and the glass had cut his head open.

It was four months after that when a pale and delicate-looking Englishman arrived in Sierra Leone, in charge of an English missionary. He had had brain fever, and had only escaped with his life by a miracle. The good missionary had tended him, and nursed him back to health, and when he was able to move had come up to Sierra Leone with him. From thence the young Englishman was to return to Europe.

That young Englishman was Hamilton Earle. When he

had recovered from his illness, Black Jack and the waistcoat had disappeared, and left no trace. Heartsick and broken in health, he wished for one thing only now—that was, to get back to England as soon as possible.

He had not been in Sierra Leone two hours when the missionary came running to him with a telegraphic message.

"It's been here for months," he said; "I saw it at the post office."

Hamilton perused the message eagerly.

It was from his solicitors.

"Come back at once. Will has turned up in your favour."

The telegram had arrived the very day the adventurous traveller had left Sierra Leone for the Ivory Coast.

* * * * * *

When Hamilton Earle arrived in England, he had much to tell and much to learn. What he had to tell we already know; what he had to learn was this.

He had traced the wrong waistcoat. In searching the premises again after their client's departure, the solicitors had found under the bedding on which the old man slept the right one. Mr. Abrahams was conducting the search, and an idea struck him at once. He ripped the waistcoat open, and there was the missing will, signed and sealed, and witnessed by the law stationer and Bridget Maloney, her X.

So, after all, the young comedian came into a handsome fortune, and certainly, after all he had gone through in search of it, he deserved it. What do you think?

No. VII.

"DEVIL'S FACE."

It was a hideous face; a face so repellent that a stranger, catching sight of it for the first time, would turn aside with a shudder.

Yet it was the face of as gentle a creature as ever drew breath. At least, so said the few people who loved John Bradley. There were plenty of others who declared that the lad's features were a true index to his character, and that his seeming gentleness and patience were but assumed for purposes more or less satanic.

Never was there a greater contrast than that which existed between John Bradley and his brother Luke.

Luke was so handsome and well built, and so charming in his manner, that he was called "The Angel," in contradistinction to his elder brother John, who was known all over Coalthorpe as "The Devil," and more familiarly as "Devil's Face."

Village gossips, discussing the Bradley brothers with an inquiring stranger, were always ready with a reason for poor John's horrible appearance.

Old Mrs. Tibbetts, the greatest authority upon local events, was the fountain head of their information, for Mrs. Tibbetts had been present when Martha Bradley was brought to bed—in fact, had been sent for in her official capacity as nurse by the local surgeon, for Martha, poor young thing, was in a terribly bad way, and needed watching.

Farmer Bradley was a man well gone in years when he married pretty Martha, the parlour-maid up at the Hall, but it was a fine match for her, for Bradley was well-to-do, and had a tidy bit of money in the bank, besides a farm that yielded a fair profit; and being a saving, steady fellow, too, who loved his own fireside better than the alehouse chimney-corner, any girl who had him was sure of a comfortable home and a kind husband.

They did say—at least, Mrs. Tibbetts said—that Martha, before she came to Coalthorpe to be parlour-maid to the Squire, had been servant up in a London house, and had left a sweetheart behind in the great city. Mrs. Tibbetts had much private information on this point, for she knew that this sweetheart was a ne'er-do-well, who, after being a grocer's shopman, a coachman, a town traveller, and a policeman, had at last settled down, if settling down it can be called, into a strolling player—one of those mountebank fellows who go from fair to fair, joining any troupe that will accept their services. Martha, Mrs. Tibbetts was certain, had quite broken off with so irregular a young man, and was heartwhole when she accepted Farmer Bradley's offer, and went home to the farm as its mistress and his wife.

They were as happy a couple as need be, Mrs. Tibbetts was sure; and after they'd been married a whole year, Farmer Bradley looked happier than ever, for Martha had whispered to him something that made him feel very proud.

It was a sight to see the old fellow, said Mrs. Tibbetts, going over his farm, planning improvements, arranging this and arranging that, and reckoning up what he was worth, and all because he had made up his mind that there was to be a son and heir to come after him.

He was quite sure it was to be a son. The idea that it might, after all, be a daughter never entered his head.

Farmer Bradley evidently had great confidence in Mrs. Tibbetts at this time, for the old lady was able to tell years afterwards all that was passing in his mind in those happy days before John was born, and the stupid fellow was letting everybody see his joy and pride, like the simple, big-hearted old English yeoman that he was.

Now, Martha had, just about this time, many whims and fancies, which Mrs. Tibbetts declared was a state of affairs not at all uncommon or to be wondered at under the circumstances.

One of her whims was to go to Coalthorpe Fair.

"Fancy that!" said Mrs. Tibbetts, "with all them monstrosities and giants and dwarfs and such about, and she as she was, poor thing; but the farmer never knew no better, and he put on his hat and took her as natural and unbethinking as though she'd ha' asked to go to church o' Sunday mornin', poor dear."

From this point Mrs. Tibbetts shall tell the story in her own words:—

"She was rare and ill at the farm that evening, poor dear, and the farmer come gallopin' into the village for the doctor, and the doctor he sends on for me to go up at oncet, and I went, and never shall forget it, as it seems but yesterday, and there's 'Devil's Face' a man growed, more's the pity, poor chap.

"The poor creature was rare and bad when I got there, and a-ravin' and cryin' out, and havin' hysterics, and the farmer he stood there, with a skeered face, a-tremblin' and a-cryin' like a big baby, and a-callin' himself awful names for a-taking of her to the fair.

"They'd gone into a booth to see a mellydraymer, as they calls them blood and murder things, and there was a devil in the play—or a man as dressed up like the devil, only more higeous, to frighten a servant gal, so as to rob the house and murder the missis; and Martha, she give a little shiver at the ugly face, and trembled, and said she'd go out, and just as she was getting up the servant gal in the play tore the devil's mask off and cried, 'Ha, ha! I know you now!' and that was the end of the act, as all this I heard afterwards.

"And when the mask was torn off, Martha she cried 'Oh!' and throws up her arms and faints, and Farmer Bradley, nigh out of his mind, takes her out into the air, and gets her across the fields and home to the farm, like a man in a dream, not knowing how he done it.

"I stayed with her for a night or two, for nobody knowed what would happen then; but she got over it before the week was out, and was as quiet and right as ever, only low and sad, and not a bit like the same woman she had been.

"And that day month I was sent for again, and I stayed with her till the baby was born. And that baby was John Bradley, God help him, as the folks about here calls 'Devil's Face!"

And, Mrs. Tibbetts having told her story thus far to the inquiring stranger, would add, in a mysterious whisper, that the man in the devil's mask who had frightened Martha Bradley so terribly was her old ne'er-do-well of a sweetheart.

Let us take up the thread of the story where Mrs. Tibbetts drops it.

Farmer Bradley and his wife were almost heartbroken over the poor ugly little baby that had been given to them

as a son and heir, but the father concealed his feelings for the mother's sake, and she, pitying the child, grew in time almost to love it, though she never looked upon its face without a pang as she thought how proud her husband would have been of a handsome boy.

But three years after a second son was born—a child beautiful as an angel—and then poor little Johnny was put aside, and gradually the whole affection of the farmer's young wife centred in little Luke.

The children grew up as unlike each other in disposition as they were in appearance. The elder was thoughtful, shy, and old-fashioned; the younger was a merry, mischievous, engaging child, the idol of the household and the pet of the whole village.

As the boys grew up, poor Johnny was thrust more and more aside, and at last the mother, proud of her handsome youngest-born, began to look upon the elder child as an interloper who had robbed her beautiful boy of his birthright.

When the boys were still mere lads, old Farmer Bradley died, and then it was found that he had left the farm to his wife during her lifetime, and at her death to his eldest son, the second having only a sum of money equivalent to about half what John's inheritance would be worth.

There is no doubt there was some rough idea of justice in the farmer's mind when he made this will. He knew that poor John was heavily handicapped, and would find no friends, while handsome Luke would find them everywhere. He had doubtless also a shrewd idea that if the mother had her way Luke would be master of everything, and it would go hard with "Devil's Face."

The farm wasn't a happy home for John after his father's

death, for his mother took little pains to conceal her dissatisfaction at the advantage he had gained over his brother.

She determined that at least Luke should be master while she lived, and many a time John, stung to the quick by a careless taunt, would steal away, and bury his poor distorted face in his hands, and wish God had taken him before he grew to be such a trouble to everybody.

But, in spite of all the taunts and slights that were heaped upon him, the lad never wavered in his affection for his handsome brother.

Luke was his hero. For Luke he would do anything, and he took many a thrashing in their school days that should have fallen to Luke's share. He took the blame for everything; and so it came about that he had enemies in the village, and the reputation of being a mischievous imp.

No one suspected that of half the tricks for which "Devil's Face" was notorious, Luke was really the author; and Luke, accepting his brother's homage, grew at last to think that he was really obliging poor "Devil's Face" by letting him bear the blame.

It was when John was twenty-two and Luke nineteen that the terrible event happened which made "Devil's Face" for ever memorable in the quiet annals of Coalthorpe.

Among the maids engaged at the farm was the pretty daughter of a small tradesman in the village. Barbara Hughes assisted Mrs. Bradley in the dairy, and a pretty picture she made with her beautiful black eyes, her rosy cheeks, and her graceful little figure, set off in the daintiest of dairymaid's costumes.

Poor John would steal in furtively sometimes and watch the pretty girl at her work, and she always had a merry laugh and a gay word for him. He never felt the burden of his ugly face so terribly as when that mysterious malady, which comes unbidden and takes up its abode in the least likely place, entered his heart, and he knew that he had fallen in love with pretty Barbara.

He went out into the woods the day he made the discovery, and wandered about till nightfall, upbraiding himself for being a fool, and crying aloud in his despair that his curse was heavier than he could bear. His life had been wretched and painful enough without the torture of a hopeless passion, heaven knows!

When the night had fallen, he stole back to the farm, feeling like a guilty creature. He fancied that the people would read his secret in his eyes, and taunt him with it. He felt that for him to love such a perfect creature as Barbara was an insult to her—a shame which he should be hooted for daring to put upon her.

When he reached the outskirts of the farm, he was arrested by the sound of voices. He stood still, rooted to the spot.

Walking along the footpath on the other side of the hedge were a young man and a girl, and they were talking love. "Devil's Face" had come upon a couple of sweethearts out for a ramble. They were Barbara Hughes and his handsome brother Luke.

From that hour John Bradley struggled hard to crush down the feeling which had taken possession of his heart. But his efforts only betrayed the secret he had endeavoured to conceal. When he met Barbara he averted his eyes, and a red blush would steal unbidden over his poor, repulsive

face. The people about the farm could not help seeing it, and soon the joke went round and spread to the village that "Devil's Face" had fallen in love with pretty Barbara.

And gossip never lost the chance of adding that Barbara was a lucky girl, for she could choose between the two brothers if she liked, and have the farm and ugly John, or do without the farm and take the makeweight in good looks.

But of course it was nonsense to think that any girl would marry "Devil's Face"; and pretty Barbara flushed crimson, and stamped her little foot in rage when the people chaffed her about John's ill-concealed admiration.

And when she could stand the teasing no longer, she stammered out that if they had any eyes they'd have seen long ago whose sweetheart she was; and then she ran off to Luke, and told him, if he loved her, he'd let these scandalmongers know that she was his promised wife, and go to her father at once and ask for her hand, like an honest man.

And Luke, yielding to Barbara's entreaties, went then and there to old Hughes, and came back crestfallen. Old Hughes was not over-sweet on Master Luke, and had told him so. Luke, he said, was too fond of fine clothes and the alehouse fire, and flirting with the wenches, and sport, to make a good husband. Besides, what were his prospects? The bit of money his father left him wouldn't go far. Now, if he'd had a farm like John, it would have been different. No, the young man for his Barbara had not come to him vet.

Luke went back in a great way, and told his mother, who was highly indignant, and Barbara cried, and said she would never marry anybody else, and as Luke couldn't have her she wasn't going to stop there to be grinned at and

frightened by "Devil's Face." So Barbara left the farm, and went back to her father's in high dudgeon, and moped and lost her roses, and Luke wandered about the farm, cursing everybody in general and "Devil's Face" in particular.

Mrs. Bradley took care that John should know how cruelly his position as heir to the farm had affected his brother, and John felt more miserable than ever. He felt convinced he was only sent into the world to make everybody miserable.

He went off the next day to see the lawyer who had the family papers, and asked him if he couldn't give his brother a share in the farm; but he found he had no power to do anything—in fact, until after his mother's death he had no power to deal with the property in any shape or form.

The lawyer read the will over to him, and explained that in having it drawn, Farmer Bradley, foreseeing the position John might be placed in, had expressly left his property so that no influence of the mother's could be asserted to benefit her younger son while the elder lived.

John was in despair. He went over and saw old Hughes privately, and pleaded for his brother and Barbara; but the canny tradesman was hard-headed and hard-hearted, and turned a deaf ear. He wasn't going to have his girl marry a man who had no property—nothing in the shape of houses and land to call his own and fix him down.

Old Mr. Hughes had imbibed a notion, very prevalent in country parts, that the only "proputty" worth talking about was land. It is only fair to Mr. Hughes to say that he flourished and held these opinions at a time when Land Leagues, Griffith's valuation, and Boycotting were not terms familiar in the mouth as household words.

Then John Bradley went back to the lawyer and read the will again. The lawyer assured him he could do nothing.

"So long as you live, John Bradley," he said, "you are the heir, absolutely without power to deal. On your mother's death the farm becomes yours, and then you could deal with it; but your mother is comparatively a young woman, and may live many years. If you were to die, then of course the case would be altered. Your brother would stand in your position."

John Bradley drew a long breath, and went out of the lawyer's office. In the village he met Barbara, and her white cheeks and downcast look brought the tears into his eyes.

"Barbara!" he said, gently.

But she turned her face away, and passed on.

When he reached the farm he found his mother red-eyed and miserable. Luke, her handsome Luke, had been in to tell her that the farm was hateful to him, and he should enlist and go for a soldier.

"And if I go to the wars and get shot, mother," he added, "it will be a good job. John can have everything then."

John Bradley heard all this, and turned away with a sigh. He was in everybody's way. What a pity he couldn't go for a soldier and get shot! That would be one way out of the difficulty.

Luke's threat was no idle one, it seemed, after all. He was really going to enlist. Mrs. Bradley was beside herself with grief. Barbara Hughes had shut herself up in her room, and was breaking her heart.

John Bradley heard it all, knew it all, and he was powerless to help it. His poor face, repulsive always, grew in its agitation and misery more hideous than ever.

On the night before Luke's departure for the county town, the poor broken-hearted mother sat up with her boy, weeping, and beseeching him to alter his mind; but he was hard as adamant.

"Come to my room before you go, Luke," said John softly, as he shook hands with his brother. "I don't feel very well; I'm going up stairs."

"All right, John; I'll come and say good-bye in the morning, for I'm off at daybreak," answered Luke.

The next morning, true to his promise, Luke entered his brother's room.

John, pale, gasping for breath, and moaning with agony, lifted up his head.

"Good heavens, John! What's the matter?" cried Luke.

"Hush!" whispered John, grasping his hand. "It's all over, Luke. In the night I felt ill, and I got up to get some medicine. I took the stuff we used to make the sheep-wash with by mistake. It's settled me."

Luke would have torn himself away and run for medical aid, but John held him.

"A doctor's no use," he gasped. "Let me see mother and—and Barbara. I'd like to say good-bye to her. Send for them."

Luke ran from the room, and presently Mrs. Bradley, pale and trembling, stood by her son's bedside.

The doctor came, but he saw that the case was hopeless. The agonies of death were on John Bradley.

Presently Barbara Hughes, brought by a swift messenger,

came in to stand, awe-struck and weeping, by the deathbed of the man who loved her.

The last terrors of death were on him as she entered the room, and his writhing was terrible. He motioned her to stoop down; then, gathering his failing powers for one supreme effort, he whispered—

"You can marry Luke now—he'll have the farm. God bless you, Barbara!"

"Oh, John," she sobbed, "don't, don't!" Then she fell on her knees, and flung her arms around him, and pressed her bright red lips to his poor distorted face.

A smile passed over it then—a sweet, happy smile, and the eyes closed, and all was still.

"Devil's Face" had taken that kiss with him to eternity.

No. VIII.

THE BOND OF BLOOD.

JACK MEADOWS was the terror of the little village of Slocum. Slocum, I should say, for the benefit of those of my readers whose knowledge of their native country is limited, is situated in one of the pleasantest parts of the South Coast district, and is a village hamlet pure and simple. It consists of eighteen houses, of which two are public ones, a church, and three shops. The greatest man in Slocum was of course the parson; but the richest man, and the most popular, was Master Martin, the miller and farmer, whose place was about a quarter of a mile from the village.

When I call him rich, I use the word in a comparative sense. He was rich for Slocum.

Now, Jack Meadows and the miller didn't get on well together at all. Jack was the son of one of the publicans, and he was sent to Master Martin to learn the milling.

"Some day," said his father, "he will be able to have a mill of his own."

Jack Meadows was not very long before he fulfilled his father's prophecy.

He did have a mill—several mills, for he fought every male being on the premises of a fightable age, and would doubtless have fought the miller himself if the latter hadn't curbed the youth's ambition in that direction by giving him a sound drubbing, and sending him about his business for making love to his (the miller's) pretty daughter Jenny.

Jenny was a dark-eyed, buxom little wench of sixteen, and the handsome young scapegrace, Jack Meadows, had soon persuaded her to play at sweethearts.

Underlying all his mischief, begotten chiefly of his vigorous health and rude animal spirits, there was a sound heart, and Jack would have gone through fire and water at a word from the miller's daughter.

But directly the miller found out how the land lay, and that Master Jack had already planned out an elopement on a magnificently romantic scale, he, like a wise father, determined to infuse a little reality into the affair.

Catching Jack, one summer afternoon, when he ought to have been at work, whispering soft nothings into Miss Jenny's ear in the kitchen, and helping himself to a huge slice of apple-turnover from the pantry at the same time, Master Martin caught up the copper-stick, and laid it vigorously about the youthful Romeo's shoulders, while Juliet rushed into the pantry, and locked herself in, where her father found her half an hour after, weeping still, but temporarily consoling herself with the remaining portion of the turnover.

The miller spoke a few sensible words to Jenny—told her that Jack was an idle fellow, and would never be worth any decent girl troubling her head about.

Whereupon Jenny began to cry afresh, and continued crying till the miller fairly lost his temper, and, vowing he would make short work of this love affair, sent Master Jack about his business, and promised his daughter that, if ever she spoke to the young man again, she should be sent out to service instead of being kept at home at the mill like a lady

Jack went home to his father's house in the village,

vowing vengeance against everybody. There he got another thrashing for losing his place, and that decided him on his next course of action.

He was sick of being bullied. There wasn't a fellow in all Slocum that he hadn't conquered in single combat; he was tired of mischief, and he couldn't make love to Jenny Martin.

He would go to sea.

He had read many a stirring narrative of the delights and perils of a sailor's life, and it was just the sort of life in which he would be able to find relief from the monotony of existence at Slocum.

He managed by means of a trusty messenger—a boy employed at the mill, whose head he promised to punch if he refused the delicate mission—to convey a short note to Jenny informing her of his intention to bid his native land adieu, and he named a spot where, at a certain hour, she might meet him, and bid him a long farewell.

How could Jenny refuse?

The poor fellow was being driven away from home, and all for her sake.

That afternoon she took Rover the dog, and went for a long walk by the banks of the river, and at a nice quiet spot, a mile and a half from the mill, she found Jack waiting for her.

He told her his plans—how he was going to sea in a ship bound for those far-away countries where gold and silver and diamonds were as common as blackberries on the Slocum hedgerows in September. He should come back rich and claim her. Then he made her promise to remain faithful to him. In a book he had been reading lately there was a young knight who went to the Holy

Wars, and before he started he exchanged vows with his lady-love. Jack had copied the oaths out carefully, because he saw how appropriate they were to his own circumstances.

It was very romantic, this leavetaking, and Jenny was quite carried away by it, and was ready to swear anything.

Jack read the vows over to her, and Jenny's face went white when he came to the end, for these young lovers of the olden time had written them out on parchment with their own blood.

"Oh, Jack, I couldn't do that!" whimpered Jenny, with a shudder, for she had visions that nothing but a gory signature would satisfy her ardent admirer.

"Oh, but you must!" said Jack. "Look here; I've got the vows written out on paper. I couldn't get any parchment, and I've pricked my finger, and signed it with my blood, and I'll give it to you. Here's your vow written; now, all you've got to do is to sign it. I've brought a pen."

"Oh, Jack, I can't; dear Jack, don't ask me to do that!"

"Ah, false girl, you do not love me! I have nothing left to live for. I will drown myself at once!"

Jack made a melodramatic start towards the river's brink; Jenny shrieked, and seized him by the jacket.

"Oh, Jack—dear Jack!—don't drown yourself."

"Then sign!" exclaimed the lover. "One—two——"

"I'll do anything, Jack; only please don't drown yourself."

Jack came a little way from the river's edge.

"I'll sign it presently, Jack," said Jenny. "You've made me so nervous, I couldn't hold the pen. Come across the fields, and we'll talk about it."

All Jenny was anxious to do was to get Jack away from that dreadful river.

They strolled across the fields together, and Jack renewed his romantic protestations of faithfulness, and gave his little sweetheart a glowing account of all the beautiful things he intended to bring her home from the golden West.

As they were passing a thick hedgerow, Jenny saw a beautiful dog rose.

She remembered that in stories young ladies generally gave their lovers a flower at parting, which the lover kept long after it had faded, and gazed upon in such distant climes as said lovers might journey to.

She would give Jack the wild rose.

She reached up, and stretched out her little white hand to pluck it, and then jumped back with a sharp cry of pain.

Wild roses have cruel guardians in the shape of thorns, and one of these had penetrated the rosy finger of the miller's daughter, and brought the blood.

"An omen!" exclaimed Jack, looking at the little wounded finger, which Jenny stretched out to him in a mute appeal for sympathy. "An omen, Jenny. You can sign the bond."

Now that the pain was over, and chance had supplied the necessary ink, Jenny could offer no further objection. Jack produced the pen from his jacket pocket, and Jenny, half frightened and half ashamed, dipped the nib in the little red bead of blood, and scrawled her signature to the document with a trembling hand.

Then Jack handed her his vow, already duly signed, and took hers in exchange.

Before he put it into his bosom—that's where the young knight had placed his—he read it over:—

If I be false to my true knight,
Who goes to distant lands,
My life to take shall be his right,
With his own knightly hands.

And if I with another wed,
When he is far away,
After that my own blood be shed,
Him also may he slay.

"It's very dreadful, Jack," said Jenny, as her lover secreted the sanguinary bond.

But Jack reassured her. It was a mere matter of form, and quite usual between young lovers who had unnatural parents. Then they strolled along through the pleasant fields, renewing their vows of constancy until the position of the sun in the heavens warned the Slocum Juliet that it was time to tear herself from Romeo, and return to the more prosaic occupation of preparing old Capulet's tea.

Then, with many a passionate promise and tender embrace, the young couple bade each other a long farewell.

And the next day it was known all over Slocum that Jack the dare-devil, Jack the tyrant, Jack the ne'er-do-well, had run away to sea.

The secret of the solemn agreement she had entered into remained locked in the bosom of the miller's daughter, and in the bosom of one other damsel as well. Jenny's dearest female friend was Maggie Smith, the farrier's daughter, and to Maggie, under a solemn vow of secrecy, the romantic episode was imparted in the twilight of a summer evening, over a dish of syllabub.

* * * * *

Five years passed over Slocum as it did over most other places, changing slowly the old order of things. There were new baby faces at many a cottage window, and many

a wrinkled old one missed from its accustomed place. Girls and boys had grown into youths and maidens, youths and maidens had become husbands and wives, and were responsible for the new faces aforesaid. Five years had brought social changes in Slocum, too. There was a new clergyman, and there were two new shops. Jack Meadows's father had moved away to a large town, and Master Martin, the miller, had moved away to a country which is not on any map, and to which all the inhabitants of Slocum received an emigrant's free pass with the first breath they drew. The greatest man in the district now was young John Hodges, who had a farm near the mill, and who, having money left him by an old uncle in the North, had improved the land, and was waxing rapidly into a Slocum Rothschild. But John, though a nice-looking young man, was a careful fellow, and knew how many beans made five. The land adjoining his was the farm that went with the mill, and when Master Martin died Hodges had a mind to make Mistress Jenny an offer for it.

But, thinking the matter over, he found he might do better. Why shouldn't he marry the lady, and have the land for nothing?

He was good-looking and rich, and there was nobody in the way.

Gossip said that the pretty miller's daughter had once been in love with that worthless fellow Jack Meadows, who went away to sea, and hadn't been heard of for five years. But that was a long time ago, and, if Jenny had refused plenty of offers since, it was only because there was nobody in Slocum good enough for her.

At any rate, John Hodges determined to try his luck. He did, and succeeded beyond his expectations.

Jenny had long ago given Jack Meadows up as a bad job; the silly bond she had signed she looked upon as a school-girl escapade. If Jack was not drowned, he'd very likely settled down and married a few thousand miles away.

She had never had a line from him all the time he had been absent. It wasn't worth while thinking of him any more.

The rich young farmer, her neighbour, presented himself just at the auspicious moment. Jenny was bothered out of her life with the mill. It wanted a man's hand to control it.

John Hodges was just the man, and when he came making soft eyes, Jenny was not cold or cross. By-and-by he said "Snip," and Jenny answered "Snap," without a moment's hesitation beyond the modest faltering required of young maidens according to the unwritten law of Slocum propriety

The course of true love ran as smoothly as the quiet stream that meandered by the mill, and the wedding day was fixed.

Now, just before the eventful day, somehow or other it got about Slocum that Jenny had been the affianced wife of Jack Meadows, and Jack Meadows became the hero of Slocum conversation.

It is possible that Maggie Smith, who was to be bridesmaid, had been carried away by the excitement of the situation, and revealed the secret of the Bond of Blood.

At any rate, the story got about. Old tales of Jack's daring and violence were told, and Master John Hodges got to hear of the affair.

Of course, he laughed at the idea of anyone interfering with him; but it wasn't pleasant to know that you were

going to marry a girl whose former lover had full permission to help himself to your gore.

Jenny was very cross that the story had leaked out, and she was annoyed that Jack's name should have got mixed up with her wedding in any way at all. In a village like Slocum anything to talk about is a godsend, and gossips made the most of it. They made so much of Jack Meadows and his Bond of Blood that presently every man, woman, and child for ten miles round had the whole story at their fingers'-ends.

It was a beautiful July day when the bells of the old church rang out a merry peal of welcome to the miller's daughter and Master Hodges. All the village was there. The lads and lasses wore wedding favours, and there were to be fine doings at the mill. Everybody was to go back after the ceremony, and the barn had been cleared for dancing in the afternoon, and blind Dan, who played the fiddle, was to have a whole half-sovereign for being the musician on the occasion.

The mill was deserted when the ceremony was proceeding by everybody but Bill Green, one of the boys who was left behind in charge.

Bill was enjoying himself searching in the cupboard for jam, when he heard the door open.

Shutting the cupboard hastily, he turned round and found himself face to face with a bronze-faced, broad-shouldered sailor.

- "Hullo, my hearty!" said the sailor. "Where's the miller?"
- "The miller, sir?" said the boy. "Why, he's been dead this two year."
 - "Dead!" exclaimed the sailor. "Poor fellow! I should

have liked to have shaken hands with him. You don't remember me, eh? Let's see! Aren't you little Bill Green?"

Billy Green's eyes had been gradually opening wider and wider, and his mouth had been similarly employed. It was only last night his granny had been talking about Jack Meadows and Mistress Jenny, and there was no doubt in the boy's mind as to who this seafaring stranger was.

"Where's Jenny?" asked the sailor presently, after glancing round the familiar place.

"Mistress," stammered the boy; "oh, I'll go and fetch her."

And before the sailor could say a word, Billy Green war out of the place and tearing towards the church as fast as his legs could carry him.

The wedding party were just leaving the church all smiles and merriment as Bill came up to them.

"Oh, Miss Jenny!" he exclaimed, his eyes nearly out of his head with terror. "Oh, Miss Jenny! He's come!"

"He! Who?" gasped the bride, her face going as white as the wedding favours.

"Jack Meadows!" cried the boy.

Jenny fainted. The bridegroom's knees trembled under him. The villagers looked at each other in dismay. Maggie Smith, the bridesmaid, fanned the bride, and urged her to be calm.

A council of war was held at once. What was to be done? The bridegroom absolutely refused to return to the mill and be murdered.

Presently Jenny recovered, and offered a suggestion. If Jack could only be kept in ignorance of what had happened for the day, she would devise some means of getting rid of him. Suddenly one of the guests was seized with an idea. Let them come into her house close by, and Maggie could put on the bride's bonnet and take the bouquet and pretend to be the bride, and Jenny could be the bridesmaid.

Then they must devise some scheme to get Jack out of the house.

The bride and bridegroom consented at once—anything to avoid a scandal on the wedding day. Jenny and Maggie went into the neighbour's house, and changed what was necessary of their attire. The company were pledged to secrecy, and the wedding party returned to the mill, Maggie Smith taking the bridegroom's arm.

Jack was at the door waiting for them.

He had heard the bells ring out. The chimes and the empty house suggested an idea.

Could it be possible he had returned to find his Jenny wedded to another?

The wedding party felt very uncomfortable when they saw the sun-burnt Jack standing there, and the bridegroom's teeth chattered.

But Jack, directly he saw his Jenny was only the bridesmaid, shivered his timbers, and gave her a huge hug right before the company.

"Ah, Jenny, you didn't expect to see me again, I'll be bound, did you?"

And Jenny, very hot and red and confused, stammered out that she didn't.

Everybody shook hands with Jack, and he told them he had made plenty of money, and had come back to settle down. He'd been to see his old dad, and then come straight to Slocum. He'd had the most wonderful adventures—been shipwrecked on a desert island, taken captive by the

Moors of Barbary, been fallen in love with by the Queen of the Cannibal Islands, and been a prisoner of war; but he had finished up by helping to capture a rich prize, and his share was enough to enable him to leave the service and settle down.

Jack told his adventures during the wedding feast, and he had a joke for everybody as well, and his biggest joke of all was about the Bond of Blood that he and Jenny had signed.

Of course everybody laughed, but it was a hollow sort of a laugh, and the bridegroom turned very pale, and drank some beer the wrong way, and choked for a quarter of an hour.

Presently somebody said that of course it was only a joke—that Jack didn't consider such a bond serious.

"Don't I!" exclaimed Jack, looking dreadfully fierce, and brandishing the knife he was eating with. "It would have been bad for somebody if I'd come back and found my little Jenny false!"

Jack insisted that Jenny should sit by him, and by-andby, when he began to get jolly, his arm stole round her waist.

He chaffed the bridegroom about looking so miserable, and the bridegroom began to get very hot and indignant. It wasn't nice to see that sailor fellow carrying on with the bride like that, and before all the village, too.

After the feast Jack insisted that Jenny should come for a stroll round the farm with him, as he had such a lot to tell her, and he wouldn't be said no to.

And just as they were walking in a nice quiet place, and Jack was squeezing Jenny's hand and calling her his little wife that was to be, the poor bridegroom, who had been

following on tiptoe, uttered a groan, and Jack turned round and saw him.

"Shiver my timbers, messmate, look'ee here!" said Jack furiously; "why are you playing spy like this? Go to your wife, sir. I'm ashamed of you leaving her alone on her wedding day!"

"But I ——," stammered John Hodges.

"See here, mate," exclaimed Jack Meadows, "if I catch you eavesdropping again, I'll give you the soundest thrashing you ever had in your life, though it is your wedding day!"

Poor John stole off crestfallen and miserable, and went to the barn where the dancing was, and when he saw Jack and Jenny come in he began such a desperate flirtation with Maggie, his supposed bride, that it was Jenny's turn to be jealous.

It was getting very uncomfortable for them both; but what were they to do? Jack was so violent that he would smash everything in the place, even if he didn't instantly redeem his bond, and have their lives.

Everybody in Slocum knew the sort of man Jack was, and nobody was inclined to risk putting him in a rage.

Matters might have become serious, for nobody could think of any way to get rid of Jack, who was a terrible wet blanket to the festivities. Evening was coming on, the guests were going, and Jack was talking of what a nice quiet half-hour's chat he and Jenny would have when the bride and bridegroom had gone to their own home.

The bride and bridegroom, however, seemed in no hurry to go, and Jack gave Master Hodges a quiet hint that he should like to be left alone with Jenny, and that he and Mrs. Hodges could go as soon as they liked.

Mr. Hodges didn't seem to see it.

He said, "I say—look here, you know"—and "Dash it all!" and it appeared as if there was something more to come, only it never did.

At last, when all the guests were gone, and there were only the hands on the premises, and Jack and Jenny and the bridegroom and Maggie Smith, and Jack showed no signs of taking his departure, Mr. Hodges grew desperate, and determined to go off at once to the nearest magistrate, swear that he was in terror of his life, and demand a police escort to protect him, and turn Jack out.

But Jack saved him the trouble by bringing matters to a climax.

He deliberately thrust Mr. Hodges and Maggie out of the sitting-room and locked the door!

Mr. Hodges danced about outside, knocking and thumping and shouting; but Jack, paying no attention, went over to Jenny and found her trembling like a frightened bird.

"Jenny," he said softly, "I haven't had a minute to speak with you alone to-day, and I must leave Slocum to-night. I couldn't go without a word or two, and so I was obliged to lock that troublesome fool out. Jenny, tell me the honest truth—do you love me still?"

Jenny looked up. Light loomed in the sky.

"I will tell the truth, Jack. Five years have made a difference in my feelings."

"And very natural, too, my lass! And so they have in mine; but I wanted to be straight and honest with you. I have seen a girl I could love better than you, Jenny, but I wouldn't say a word to her till I'd seen how the land lay nere. Here, Jenny, take this, and God bless you!"

Jack had drawn from his breast pocket a ragged old paper.

It was the Bond of Blood!

With a cry of joy, Jenny seized it, and tore it into atoms.

"Oh, Jack," she cried, "you've taken such a load from my heart! We were afraid you'd murder us all if you found it out, and so we had to deceive you. It is my wedding you've assisted at to-day."

"What?" roared Jack. "Your wedding!"

"Yes, and Mr. Hodges is my husband, and you've used him shamefully, and Maggie's only the bridesmaid, and we changed bonnets and things."

Jack dropped into a chair, and roared with laughter till the tears streamed down his face.

Then he ran to the door and unlocked it, and let in poor John Hodges, who was almost black in the face.

"Come in, old fellow!" said Jack; "I'm sure I beg your pardon. But it's all your own fault. Dash it all, man! you didn't think Jack Meadows was such a bloodthirsty dog as all that, did you? There, go and give Mrs. H. a kiss, and never mind me! You've got a lot of lost time to make up for, and it's all my fault, so I'll say good night, and give Maggie here my arm back to the village."

Mr. Hodges gave a sigh of relief. At last he was the happy possessor of his own bride, and there was no fear of his being married and killed on the same day

He shook hands warmly with Jack, and then, with a hearty good-night and a manly grip of the hand, the sailor looked into his false sweetheart's eyes for the last time, and went off with Maggie without a sigh.

He, too, was glad to be rid of his foolish vow, for in a North-country town he knew a dark-eyed lassie who would be truer to him than the miller's daughter of Slocum had been, the Bond of Blood notwithstanding.

No. IX.

No. 965.*

"BLANCHE will marry the fellow, you mark my words."

"Oh, nonsense, Charley! she'll never be so foolish as that. A man only just come to the colony, of whom we know positively nothing! Blanche has been much too well brought up for that."

"My dear child, what the dickens has a girl's bringingup to do with her affections? Blanche is in love with Tom Scott, and she'll marry him, or my name is not Charles Parker."

The speaker was a well-to-do young tradesman of Melbourne, and the lady he addressed was his wife and Blanche Erroll's elder sister.

Blanche lived with them in their pretty little home, a pleasant hour's drive from the town, and the Tom Scott in question, a good-looking, pleasant-spoken young Englishman, had somehow or other got acquainted with the family and become a constant visitor.

It was really Charley's fault, for he brought him home in the first instance to dinner. Tom was a capital companion, full of anecdote, and knew all the latest gossip of the Old World, and Charley had taken a fancy to him.

^{*} The incidents on which this story is founded actually occurred. The parties concerned are still living, and one of them is well known. For their sakes certain alterations have been made in the plot and the dénouement in order to prevent identification.

It was only when he discovered that Blanche, his sisterin-law, had also taken a great fancy to the visitor, that Charley began to wonder if he had done right in introducing a young fellow of whose position he knew nothing into the family circle.

It was too late to do much when the real state of affairs dawned upon him, for Mr. Scott had proposed to Blanche, who was of age, and her own mistress; and Blanche, though she had not said "Yes" right off, was yet in such a frame of mind that her brother-in-law felt certain she would be Mrs. Scott, and said so.

And Mrs. Scott, in due time, she became; and her husband was a lucky fellow, for not only was she one of the prettiest girls in Melbourne, but she had a good round thousand pounds, which her father had left her, besides an interest in the business which had been his, and of which Mr. Parker, who had been his manager, became the principal on his death.

Charley Parker didn't like the marriage at all. In the first place, he knew that the young Englishmen who come out to the colonies sometimes have anything but a pleasant history; and in the next he objected to a stranger like Tom having an interest in the business, which, as Blanche's husband, of course he would have.

For a time Mr. and Mrs. Scott were happy enough, and nothing occurred to justify Parker's fears. Whenever he visited them he found Tom a kind and loving husband, and Blanche's pretty face as free from care as it was before she wore a wedding-ring.

At last Mr. Parker began to see that he had been wrong in opposing the marriage. Tom never troubled him about the business. He took his cheque quarterly and banked it. There were no signs of extravagance; and Blanche, who, in due course, added the usual baby to the picture of domestic bliss, declared that there wasn't a better husband than Tom in the world.

The only thing that set her thinking sometimes was the fact that no letters from the old country ever arrived for her husband, and that he never spoke of his father or mother.

He told her, when she asked him, that they were dead, and that he had no relatives in England.

It was after they had been married about two years that the aspect of affairs suddenly changed.

Tom became restless and low-spirited. He wasn't half so affectionate as he had been, and he left off taking notice of baby's pretty ways.

His wife fretted visibly, and he tried to soothe her. He told her his was a queer sort of disposition, and that every now and then he had a fit of the fidgets. It would soon be over. Unfortunately, it was not soon over. The fit of fidgets increased in intensity. Tom became ill-tempered and sullen. He would go out early in the morning, and return late at night.

One day he went out early in the morning and didn't return at all.

Blanche, in a terrible state, rushed off to her brother-inlaw, and for days the family remained in a state of suspense as to the missing man's fate.

Blanche thought an accident had happened to him, or that he might have been robbed and murdered.

At the end of a week, however, Mr. Parker had ascertained enough to convince him that Mr. Scott's absence was a voluntary one. On going to the bank he discovered that

every penny standing in Scott's name had been drawn out by cheque the day previous to his disappearance, and that, wherever he was, he had Blanche's thousand pounds with him. Up to the time of his flight the sum had remained intact, the income drawn from the business having been sufficient for their modest household expenses.

Mr. Parker also ascertained at the bank that Scott must have brought money to the colony, for after his marriage with Blanche he had banked nearly a thousand pounds himself. The balance of this had also been drawn out in cash a few days previously. It was evident, therefore, that Mr. Scott's disappearance was prearranged, and there seemed little doubt that he had left Melbourne as mysteriously as he had entered it.

Gradually poor Blanche made up her mind that she had been cruelly deserted, and, selling off her home, went back to live with her sister. Her only consolation was the child, and many a time was little Blanche's face wet with the tears that trickled from the mother's eyes. Blanche had loved her handsome, light-hearted husband with all the passion and fervour of a young and guileless heart; and even now, in spite of his cruelty and cowardice, she never closed her eyes at night without praying that God would shield the father of her child from harm wherever he might be.

* * * * *

While Mrs. Scott was keeping the first year of her strange bereavement in strict retirement in Melbourne, there was living in London a young wife who had also been deserted under the cruellest circumstances.

Lottie Sharpe was the daughter of a gentleman of means and position—one Mr. Brewtnall.

Mr. Brewtnall was a man who spent much time and a considerable amount of money in improving the moral and social status of his fellow-citizens. He was connected with scores of philanthropic movements, and was the author of innumerable pamphlets upon the religious questions of the day. Always ready to make a speech on temperance, take the chair at a mothers' meeting, or discourse to Young Men's Mutual Improvement Societies, Mr. Brewtnall had his evenings fully occupied, and had little time to spare for his more immediate family affairs.

He went to business at nine, dined out in the middle of the day, and, as he generally attended six evening meetings a week, it was very rarely that he reached his home before half-past ten or eleven at night.

Under these circumstances, being a widower, his daughters Lottie and Ella were compelled to fall back upon each other's society for amusement; and they must have found it insufficient for their demands, for they both considered it necessary to have a sweetheart.

Ella's sweetheart was a nice, respectable young fellow, and a youth after Mr. Brewtnall's own heart. His parents had given him a Biblical name, and called him Ebenezer. With such a name the young man's pursuits were limited. An Ebenezer could hardly patronise frivolous entertainments, or play at billiards, or smoke. Consequently, young Mr. Ebenezer Meritt cultivated early in life those circles where his name was most likely to be received with the respect due to it. At seven he collected money for missionary enterprise, at ten he explained the Bible to a class at Sunday school, at fifteen he addressed mothers' meetings on the principles of Christian household management, at eighteen he was a leading debater on theological

problems at the Young Men's Christian Association, and at twenty he fell in love with Mr. Brewtnall's eldest daughter Ella.

Mr. Brewtnall was quite willing, and the young man was very useful to him. He made him a sort of secretary without salary, and also allowed him to call at the office in the City and take home his (Mr. Brewtnall's) black bag, and various messages of a domestic character.

Of course, when Ebenezer brought papa's bag, Ella asked him in, and of course Ebenezer went, and remained for an hour or so in Christian converse with the damsel.

It would have been all very nice if the sweethearting had stopped at Ebenezer. Unfortunately, Lottie, finding it awkward to play gooseberry every evening, determined to have a sweetheart too, and found one in Tom Sharpe, the good-looking young fellow who lodged at Mrs. M'Pherson's, opposite.

Papa Brewtnall knew Tom, because Tom went to the City by the same omnibus every morning, and was very polite to him, and Tom in time found out about the black bag and the parcels, and took to calling five minutes before Ebenezer, and walking off with them.

Then, of course, Tom was asked in, and at last it grew to a family evening party of four—Ella and Ebenezer, and Lottie and Tom.

Ebenezer and Ella were going to be married when he was five-and-twenty, and when Ebenezer had saved enough money to take a house. Lottie and Tom—well, as a matter of fact, about a year after these evening parties commenced, Lottie, for certain very good and sufficient reasons, was obliged to inform her papa that, so far from intending to wait five years, like Ella, she didn't intend to wait at all,

and—and—well, she couldn't help it, but—oh! she hoped papa would forgive her—she and Tom had got married six months ago, on the sly.

Mr. Brewtnall'swallowed his hot tea at a gulp, and nearly had an apoplectic fit. But it was no good being cross now; the mischief was done, and he must make the best of it.

He ascertained that Master Tom was in receipt of the magnificent income of twenty-five shillings a week, out of which he spent thirty shillings, and that his friends would do nothing for him. As on the previous day Mr. Brewtnall had given a hundred pounds to the Zenana women, he couldn't well do less for his own daughter. Lottie was duly furnished with a sum of money, apartments were taken for her and Tom, and she went off with her young husband, and in a short time the reason that she had made haste to confess her wifehood became apparent.

Master Tom was a jolly young husband as long as things went straight, and Lottie's father supplied them with money; but the baby he voted an awful nuisance in apartments, and suggested "the old man" should furnish them a house.

This "the old man" politely declined to do; where-upon Tom, pressed by outstanding creditors, worried at home, and repenting at leisure his hasty marriage, rushed to outside distractions for consolation, and found them at the billiard-table, on the turf, and in the music-hall. Result to Mr. Tom Sharpe: County-courted out of his mind, lectured by his father-in-law, and utterly down on his luck. Result to Mrs. Tom Sharpe: Tears, hysterics, misery, a black eye (from Tom), and an offer of protection (from pa). The former received with shrieks and vows of vengeance,

the latter accepted with thanks "for baby's sake, poor dear."

Directly his wife deserted him, Tom felt very miserable, and tried the effect of brandy-and-water. His misery yielded to the treatment, and was replaced by indignation. The indignation took the form of ringing his father-in-law's bell at all hours of the night, and demanding his wife.

One evening Ebenezer went out to try and get him away, and received a terrible black eye, which almost broke the poor young man's heart. It was so utterly out of character with a Biblical name to have a black eye, that Ebenezer felt that he had disgraced himself in a way which was enough to bring his sponsors out of their graves.

He had pluck enough, however, to bind Tom over to keep the peace, and thus freed the family from annoyance for a time; and then Tom must have gone away, and got into very bad company, for the next the family heard of him was that he had embezzled a large sum of money from his employers, and fled the country.

Mr. Brewtnall was very glad to be rid of so troublesome a son-in-law, and no one could be really grieved when the baby, who had been weak and ailing from the first, made a speedy exit from the theatre of life in which it had made such an inauspicious first appearance.

It was about three years after Tom Sharpe's disappearance that one night late a knock came at the door. Lottie, who was in the hall, thinking it was the boy with the evening newspaper, opened it, and then started back with a cry

It was Tom!

Of course, Mr. Brewtnall was not at home. He had gone to the docks that evening to preside over a society which

had just been formed to teach sailors crochet-work, in the hope that it would keep them out of mischief in the evenings when ashore.

Tom slipped in, and closed the door.

His face was white, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse. There was a strange look in his eyes, and Lottie knew he had been drinking heavily.

Ebenezer had run up into the hall, hearing Lottie's cry, but directly he saw Tom he trotted down the stairs into the breakfast-room again, and told Ella who was there.

"Go for a policeman!" cried Ella, "or there'll be mischief done."

Without a second thought Ebenezer, as pale as a turnip, slipped out the back way, and went up the area steps into the street to look for a constable.

Tom, in the meanwhile, had caught Lottie by the wrist, and his hot breath swept her cheek.

"Lottie, old girl," he said, "I've come back for you, you see. Put on your bonnet and come with me. You're my wife, and by —— I mean to claim you!"

"Leave me alone, Tom!" cried Lottie, trembling and struggling, "or I'll call for help."

The drunken man thrust his hand into his breast-pocket, and drew out a pistol.

"Look here, Lottie!" he exclaimed; "if you don't come with me, I'll shoot you—there!"

It is probable he only meant to frighten her, and it had the desired effect.

Lottie, putting her hands before her eyes, fell on her knees, and shrieked for mercy.

Ella came running up stairs, alarmed at her sister's cries.

At that moment Ebenezer arrived with the policeman, and brought him in the back way.

Tom was still standing with his back to the door, and the pistol levelled at Lottie, when the officer, followed by Ebenezer, appeared upon the scene.

The drunken man's face went livid with rage.

"Seize him!" shrieked Ebenezer. "He'll kill her!"

"Touch me, and you're a dead man!" cried Tom, pointing the pistol at the constable.

The officer made a dash forward to seize Tom's outstretched arm.

At that moment there was a loud report, and the unfortunate policeman fell forward with a groan.

The drunken madman had shot him through the heart!

* * * * * *

Wilful murder!

That was the verdict when the whole story had been sifted. The motive for the murder was strong enough. The theory that it was the deed of a drunken madman fell to the ground. The prosecution declared it to be a deliberate assassination of the constable. Sharpe had reason to dread the consequence of the arrest, because he would have been tried for embezzlement, and on that charge he was liable to a long term of penal servitude. It came out in evidence that he had spent large sums in dissipation since his arrival in England from abroad, but the police had been unable to find out where he had been during the last three years. The case created intense excitement in London, from the fact that the murderer was the son-in-law of a well-known philanthropist, and exertions were made in many quarters to prove that the pistol went off accidentally. But the

verdict of wilful murder was returned, and Tom Sharpe was sentenced to death.

At the last moment, owing to the unflagging exertions of the people opposed to capital punishment, and the fact that there was a semblance of doubt as to the actual intention of the man, the sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life, and the ill-starred man passed into the lingering life in death that is a thousand times more horrible than the swift vengeance of Marwood's rope.

* * * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Parker, and Blanche and her child, had come to England for a short stay.

Mr. Parker's business had increased rapidly, and he had sent an exhibit to the Paris Exhibition, and come over with it, bringing the ladies for the trip. From Paris they came to London, to see the sights of the great metropolis.

"Blanchie must go to Madame Tussaud's and see the waxworks," said Mr. Parker one morning. "I think we will go this afternoon."

That afternoon accordingly the Australians set out from their hotel for the famous exhibition in Baker-street.

They were delighted with the kings and queens and the noble lords and ladies in their splendid raiment, and Blanchie, the child, went and sat down by an old gentleman who moved his head about and took snuff, and presently Mrs. Parker, wishing to sit down too, asked the old gentleman if he would mind moving up a little bit higher, and the people standing near laughed right out.

Then Mrs. Parker turned round and laughed too, for she discovered the old gentleman was William Cobbett in wax.

"We must see the Chamber of Horrors!" exclaimed Mr. Parker presently.

"What about little Blanchie?" said Mrs. Scott. "I'm afraid she would be terrified."

"I'm not sure I should like it, dear," suggested Mrs. Parker; "I've heard some of the figures are very dreadful. Suppose you go first and see."

"All right," said Mr. Parker, "I will."

He took the catalogue from his wife, paid his sixpence, and passed into the gloomy collection of murderers and miscreants not without a slight tremor himself.

With the catalogue in his hand, he shuddered at the dying Marat as the life-blood dripped from the wound that Charlotte Corday's avenging knife had made. He gazed compassionately on the poor old prisoner of the Bastille, who had grown to love the only companions of his solitude, the rats. He turned away with a shudder from the villainous countenances of Burke and Hare, and remembered, as he gazed at Mrs. Manning in her black satin gown, how that lady's appearance in one at her execution had sent black satin dresses out of fashion for years.

When he came to where the wicked people were crowded close together, and found how pleasant and gentle some of them looked, he took to reading the catalogue first, and then searching out the subject, so that he might see if the face was anything like he expected it to be.

The first number he tried in this way was No. 965. He read the account in the catalogue. It was the portrait-model of a young man who had been condemned to death for murder, and who was undergoing penal servitude for life.

Then he looked up at the figure thus numbered, and started back with a cry of horror that caused the people about him to turn from the waxworks and gaze at him.

No. 965 was Blanche's husband, Tom Scott, who had so mysteriously disappeared from Melbourne!

Mr. Parker sat down for a moment to collect his senses, then with a white face he staggered out of the ghastly room.

"Come away!" he said to his wife and her sister; "come away! It's turned me sick. For God's sake don't enter that room!"

They obeyed him silently, and went out into the air; but they kept wondering what it was that had so unnerved Mr. Parker in the Chamber of Horrors.

Before he left England he investigated the whole case, and learnt enough to prove that poor Blanche had been most cruelly betrayed. There was, however, this consolation—that the wretched criminal was never her legal husband.

Some day Mr. Parker thinks he will tell Blanche that she is a free woman, free to marry again; but the story he will have to tell is so ghastly that he will never divulge it, I fancy, unless he sees it is necessary for his sister-in-law's happiness that he should do so.

No. X.

MR. PRETTYJOHN'S PARROT.

MR. PRETTYJOHN'S parrot was a very clever bird. It could not only say "Pretty Poll," "What's o'clock?" and whistle "Pop goes the Weasel"; it could also swear with tolerable fluency, call the black-and-tan terrier by name, and shout "Julia" in a voice so closely resembling that of Mr. Prettyjohn, that more than once Mrs. P came down stairs in a hurry.

John Prettyjohn, author and journalist, found his principal amusement in studying the habits and customs of the pets with which he had surrounded himself. When he had sent off his leader for the weekly paper on which he was engaged, written his story for the Family Frightener, and had an hour or two at the comedy which he was quite confident would one day be accepted by a London manager, and bring him fame and fortune, Mr. P would drop into his favourite armchair, call the black-and-tan terrier Jack to come and sit on his knees, and throw a reel of cotton from Mrs. P's workbox to the happy family on the hearthrug in order to encourage them to commence the evening sports.

The happy family in question consisted of Mrs. Cat and the two Masters Cat, the said young gentlemen being two tabby imps of mischief in the first glow of kittenhood.

The games those kittens and their mamma would play with that reel of cotton would send the jaded author into

convulsions; and when the game ended, as it generally did, in the kittens starting a wild steeplechase round the room after mamma's tail, in the course of which the sideboard, the mantelshelf, the chair-backs and the diningtable, were all taken in a series of flying leaps, Mr. Prettyjohn would laugh until the tears came into his eyes.

But when Polly came the kittens were getting big boys, and rather sedate, so that Mr. Prettyjohn was thrown more into Polly's society, and occupied his leisure in teaching her a few more accomplishments.

As an author, Mr. Prettyjohn was known chiefly for his short sensation stories—stories of plot and passion and mystery, which had sent up the circulation of the *Family Frightener*, and caused quite a run upon him from the editors of similar publications.

For a time he found no difficulty in coping with the demand, but presently, having manufactured mysteries and harrowing sensations of every conceivable kind, he found himself hard up for an idea.

Mrs. Prettyjohn grew quite alarmed when, at last, the necessity for novelty robbed her husband of his hitherto innocently employed leisure, and he took to pacing about the room of an evening, thinking out murders and planning sensations out loud. It wasn't a very nice thing, for instance, for a respectable middle-aged woman to be told to shut her eyes and see if the point of a carving-knife, being within an inch of her throat, caused her an intuitive feeling of dread.

Of course, John explained that he only wanted to see if it would be natural for his heroine to wake up with a presentiment of evil just as the villain was going to murder her. Then, again, she decidedly objected to be woke up in the middle of the night by a choking sensation, and to find her husband squeezing her throat.

It's true he reassured her by saying, "All right, Julia; don't be frightened—I'm only seeing if a man could throttle a woman in her sleep without her waking up!" But Mrs. Prettyjohn declared, and I think rightly, that an author has no more business to rehearse his sensations on the woman he has sworn to love and to cherish than a surgeon would have to cut his wife's leg off on Sunday because he has a little professional job of that sort to accomplish on Monday morning. Mrs. Prettyjohn grew quite cross at last, and declared that writers—especially sensational writers—had no business to get married.

It was one evening, after a little tiff, when Mrs. Prettyjohn had taken her work and retired to another room, that the unhappy author, vainly cudgelling his brains for a sensational idea, flung his work aside, and turned to his pets for a moment's recreation.

The kittens were, as I have said, grown big boys, and were sitting solemnly staring at the fire, but Polly was in a capital temper, and started off directly her master addressed her.

The story that Mr. Prettyjohn was engaged upon at the moment was a murder—a very mysterious murder—and he wanted it to be discovered in a very mysterious way. Idiot witnesses, unseen eyes, detectives on the roof, bloodstained nicknacks, they had been used ad nauseam. Mr. Prettyjohn looked at Jack, the black-and-tan. No; he was no good! The dog who convicts a murderer was as old as the Forest of Bondy, and older. Then he looked at the kittens. Might not the track of blood be

traced by the paw-marks of the victim's cat? No, that wouldn't do!

After he had been talking to Polly some time, the author quietly relapsed into a train of thought, but the bird was by no means inclined to drop the conversation, so she whistled and shrieked, and aired her favourite expressions, at the top of her voice.

This interrupted Mr. Prettyjohn's reverie.

"Shut up, Polly!" he exclaimed, but he might as well have been the Speaker endeavouring to put down Mr. Biggar. Polly went on faster than ever.

At last, fairly exasperated, Mr. Prettyjohn, whose head was full of murder, picked up a knife that lay on the table, and, brandishing it angrily, exclaimed, "Confound you! If you don't be quiet I'll do for you!"

He didn't mean anything by the threat; he was simply carried away by the situation he had in his head, but the effect upon the parrot was remarkable.

It gave vent to a wild, unearthly shriek, and uttered these remarkable words: "Help—murder! Help—murder!" and cowered quite still in the bottom of the cage. And then, for the first time, Mr. Prettyjohn noticed that his wife had come into the room while he was brandishing the knife, and looked seriously alarmed.

Mr. Prettyjohn dropped the knife. An idea had flashed instantly across his brain. "That parrot has witnessed a murder!" he said to himself. "I'm sure of it. By Jove! the very idea I wanted."

The witness who led to the detection of the crime in his story should be the parrot.

But he did not sit down and begin to write again directly.

Fiction was all very well, but here he was in the presence of a fact. If he could only trace out the murder which his own parrot had witnessed, and bring it home to the guilty person! Ah! There was an idea!

The idea took firm possession of Mr. Prettyjohn. He couldn't shake it off. What material for a long story might there not lie in the reams of fact here within his very grasp!

Yes; he would do it. Polly had seen a murder committed. How, when, and where he could not say; but he would go back along a chain of circumstances, link by link, until he arrived at the truth—the horrible, ghastly truth.

That evening Mr. Prettyjohn did no more work. He simply sat and looked at Polly, and matured his plans.

The next morning, having carefully thought out his scheme, Mr. Prettyjohn shut himself in the room with the parrot, and commenced his investigation.

He pointed a pistol at the bird. It took not the slightest notice. He pointed the knife at his own breast. The parrot whistled "Pop goes the Weasel." Then he called into the room a young man from next door, whom he had invited for the purpose, and pretended to stab him. The parrot merely remarked, "Pretty Poll," and rubbed its beak against the cage. Then the young man went out, and Mrs. P came in, and Mr. Prettyjohn flourished the knife about near her. Instantly the parrot sent up an unearthly shriek, and cried, "Help—murder! Help—murder!" The reason was evident. It was a woman who had been murdered by a man when Polly had been a witness.

Having once fixed the nature of the crime, the next step

was to discover the criminal. Mr. Prettyjohn had been a diligent student of Edgar Allan Poe, and he remembered how that eminent sensationalist's detectives went about their work. He must go from clue to clue, tracing back the parrot's career until he could link one of its former possessors with the solution of the mystery.

At least a dozen times a day did he repeat the experiment of brandishing a knife at Mrs. Prettyjohn, and each time the parrot repeated its extraordinary behaviour. Mr. Prettyjohn rubbed his hands, and commenced mapping out the plot of the story, to be called "The Unsuspected Witness; or, Murder will Out." He elaborated it in his mind, and then set about his investigations in the regions of fact.

He had bought Polly of a dealer in the Dials. To the dealer he went in order to ascertain, if possible, how he came by the bird.

The desired information was instantly accorded him. Mr. Smith, the dealer, had purchased Polly of Mr. Ephraims, of Bucklersbury, an auctioneer, and a friend of his. Mr. Ephraims had offered him the parrot cheap because it kicked up such an awful row in the sale-room, and interrupted business.

To Mr. Ephraims, of Bucklersbury, Mr. Prettyjohn went next. Mr. Ephraims was not in, but the clerk was. The clerk remembered the parrot well. It was sent to them with a lot of furniture and things by Mr. Bluchmann, of the Borough, to sell by auction. Who was Mr. Bluchmann? Well, he was a gentleman who lent money on bills of sale. Mr. Ephraims did all his business. There wasn't a week that they didn't get cartloads of stuff that Bluchmann had seized.

Mr. Prettyjohn suggested that perhaps Polly had been seized under a bill of sale.

"Exactly," answered Mr. Ephraims's clerk. "'Lor' bless you! Bluchmann seizes everything when he does go in. He's a warm member. Strips the house. Why, we have the rummiest things brought here by his men—toys, clothes, boots, umbrellas, old letters, pipes—why, he seizes the very coals in the cellar and the gallipots in the larder. Blessed if one day he didn't go into a house and bring away the cat! That's how we come to have the parrot here. She was seized under a bill of sale."

"Could you tell me who gave this bill of sale?" asked Mr. Prettyjohn.

"No, I can't," answered the clerk; "but Bluchmann's people will know. They're sure to remember, 'cos old B. kicked up a rare row with the governor for selling the bird cheap to a dealer."

Mr. Prettyjohn hurried off to Mr. Bluchmann's moneylending establishment, and, after an infinite degree of trouble, and privately tipping one of the clerks, he obtained the desired information.

The bird had been seized under an unsatisfied bill of sale from a house in Lamingford-road, Barnsbury, and the person who gave the bill of sale was a Mr. George Barnes.

That was as far as Mr. Prettyjohn could get that day, as he had to go home and do his work, but it was a very satisfactory beginning.

He felt that he was fairly on the track.

The next morning he went over to the house in Lamingford-road, knocked at the door, and asked for Mr. George Barnes.

- "He don't live here," answered the young woman who came to the door.
 - "Oh, he used to," said Mr. Prettyjohn.
- "Well, he don't now, then," answered the lady, and with that the door was shut in the inquiring stranger's face.

Nothing daunted, Mr. Prettyjohn tried next door. There, in his politest manner, he requested to know if they could tell him anything about the Mr. George Barnes who used to be their neighbour.

Next door was communicative, and Prettyjohn heard that Mr. Barnes had gone away suddenly one day, after the brokers had been in.

- "There was a parrot, wasn't there?" said Mr. Pretty-john.
- "Yes, the noisy beast! it was a nuisance to the neighbourhood."
 - "And—ah! I think there was a Mrs. Barnes?"

Mr. Prettyjohn put the question slowly and deliberately, and watched its effect.

Next door's voice sank to a whisper as it replied mysteriously,

"A Mrs. Barnes! Yes, there was at first. But she wasn't there when the break-up came. There was something queer there, we always fancied; for one day we saw her as merry as possible at the window, and then we never saw her again, and never heard of her. Mr. Barnes was in the house alone after that, and then the goods were seized, and he went away.

Mr. Prettyjohn murmured a hurried "Thank you!" and walked rapidly away. He was too full of excitement to carry the conversation further. His anticipations were realised beyond his expectations. Mrs. Barnes had dis-

appeared—of course. And perhaps the only person in the world besides Mr. Barnes who knew the history of that disappearance was Prettyjohn, of the Family Frightener. Talk about fact being stranger than fiction! Mr. Prettyjohn agreed that it certainly was. Mrs. Barnes had been murdered by her husband, and Polly had been a witness of the deed.

That witness was now in his possession, and he was Nemesis, dogging the heels of crime.

That afternoon Mr. Prettyjohn returned home, and elaborated the scheme of his story—story, by Jove! he would make a drama of it. It would take London by storm, especially if it was brought out just after the trial. Why, authors got five pounds a night for a good melodrama. Five pounds a night for two hundred nights would be a thousand pounds! Prettyjohn thrust his hands in his pockets and jingled imaginary gold. And when he ran Barnes to earth, and appeared with the parrot in court, and told his story, what a sensation it would make!

In the meantime, Mr. Barnes had to be found, and Mr. Prettyjohn determined to find him.

It was a couple of months before he succeeded, and then it was by the merest accident in the world.

He was crossing the Strand one evening, when a hansom cab came tearing along at a furious rate.

Mr. Prettyjohn, being nervous, hesitated which way to go. While he was hesitating, the cab was on to him, and he must undoubtedly have gone down under the wheels had not a pair of strong arms seized him and swung him out of danger.

"Sir," he gasped, when he had recovered from his fright, and turned round to find himself supported by a tall, good-

looking young fellow of eight or nine and twenty. "Sir; you have saved my life. Here is my card. If ever John Prettyjohn can do anything for you, sir, name it."

The stranger took the card, and in return presented his.

Mr. Prettyjohn took it, glanced at it, and then gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment.

The name on the card was "Mr. George Barnes," and underneath was an address run through with a pen, and that address was "Lamingford-road, Barnsbury."

"What is your present address?" gasped Mr. Pretty-john.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the stranger, "it isn't on, is it? No. —, Gaisford-street, Kentish Town."

"I will call on you in the morning," said Mr. Prettyjohn.
"I have something of importance to communicate to you."

And with that Mr. Prettyjohn walked away, leaving George Barnes in a state of doubt as to his intention.

"Something of importance!" he exclaimed, as he watched the retreating figure of the journalist. "Perhaps he's a wealthy merchant, and is going to make me his heir for saving his life. Well, it's time I had a slice of luck of some sort."

With which reflection Mr. George Barnes adjourned to the Gaiety bar, and had a drink in anticipation of fortune's favours.

* * * * *

Mr. Prettyjohn passed a terrible night. It was his duty to society to denounce George Barnes as a murderer, and yet this very George Barnes had saved his life. To denounce him would be to hang him, which would be a queer way of showing his gratitude. No; before he did anything he would see the young man, appeal to his

conscience, warn him of his peril, give him a clear start, and then—well, then, at least, if he didn't denounce him he would make him confess how the murder had been committed, and so obtain the materials for his realistic drama.

The next morning, shortly before noon, Mr. Prettyjohn entered Mr. Barnes's apartments in Kentish Town. The author's face was grave, his manner solemn. He returned his preserver's greeting stiffly, took a chair, cleared his throat, and commenced,

"Mr. Barnes," he said, "I believe you once lived in Lamingford-road."

"Certainly I did," said Mr. Barnes. "You saw that on my card, I presume."

Mr. Prettyjohn nodded, then drew his breath, and took fresh aim at the target of Mr. Barnes's cornice.

"Where is Mrs. Barnes?"

Mr. Prettyjohn put the question in a casual sort of way, but the effect on Barnes was electrical.

The hot blood rushed to his face, and his lips trembled.

"You know my secret," he murmured in a hollow voice.

"I do, unhappy man-I do," said Mr. Prettyjohn. "I have the parrot!"

"Goodness gracious, you don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. Barnes, leaping from his chair.

"Yes, and I have come to warn you. Leave the country at once, before I place the matter in the hands of the police. You saved my life, and I am bound to show some gratitude for that act. Tell me how you murdered your wife—then fly, ere it is too late."

"How I what?" exclaimed Mr. Barnes, looking at his guest in astonishment.

"Murdered your wife, sir," answered Mr. Prettyjohn.

- "What the deuce do you mean? I never murdered her. She's alive now. I thought from your manner you knew our story."
 - "Not murdered her! But the parrot---"

A faint smile passed over George Barnes's face.

- "Listen to my story," he said, "and then you'll understand the situation. I am an actor, my wife is an actress. When we were at Lamingford-road we both dropped out of a berth. Result, empty exchequer. In a foolish moment, to get money, I gave a bill of sale on my furniture to a rascally money-lender named Bluchmann. I paid the instalments for a time, then I and my wife had a tremendous quarrel about something. She got an engagement in the country, left me, and declared she would never live with me again. It was my fault, I dare say. Well, that knocked me over. I got reckless, and didn't pay my instalments. One day I came home and found every blessed stick cleared out."
 - "Including the parrot?" said Mr. Prettyjohn.
- "Including the parrot. Of course, hard up as I was, and knowing I had broken my contract, I could do nothing, so I let the things go."
- "Yes, but why does the parrot shriek, 'Help—murder!' eh?" said Mr. Prettyjohn, with a shake of his head, which implied grave doubts of Mr. Barnes's veracity.
- "Well, that's a very curious thing," answered the young man. "The parrot was only left with us to mind, and ought not to have been taken. She was rather a famous bird."
 - "Indeed," said Mr. Prettyjohn.
- "Yes; the people who left her with us were the De Veres, who went on a professional tour to Australia. Polly

was part of their company once. They used to play a drama in which Mr. De Vere murders Mrs. De Vere, who is a dumb woman—stabs her with a knife; and the murder is revealed by a parrot in the room, who shrieks out, 'Help—murder!' and brings the neighbours in. Polly used to do it capitally, and the piece was an immense success. Poor Polly! I'm glad she's got a good home. Hullo! What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

"It's nothing!" gasped Mr. Prettyjohn, mopping his brow. "So there's a drama, is there, in which the parrot is a witness to a murder?"

"Oh, yes; and the parrot you've got is the very identical one."

"D-!" said Mr. Prettyjohn.

And, considering the trouble he had been at only to find out that his own drama was no good, and that there had been no murder at all, the expression was, on the whole, excusable.

No. XI.

HIS RIGHTEOUS DOOM.

THE judge is about to pass sentence! Every eye in the crowded court is fixed upon the prisoner. A young man with comely features, tall, well built, neat, and gentlemanly, he is just the sort of young fellow who would win your confidence in a moment. His story has been told in open court; the jury have found him guilty, and from the lips of the judge the words are slowly and solemnly falling which banish him from all that makes life bearable, to herd with the vilest of his kind, in man's hell for man—a convict prison. Five years' penal servitude!

The words are spoken; there is a painful hush in court, then the cry of a woman and the hustling of feet, as a senseless burden is borne through the crowd of sightseers.

The prisoner hears the cry, and his white face waxes more ghastly still. His lips move; he utters one gasping cry—"Marion!"—stretches out his hands towards the burden that is carried past him; then, breaking into hysterical sobs, is led quietly from the dock by the warders.

Five years' penal servitude!

It is an awful punishment. Let us see what he has done to deserve it.

Herbert Blair was the clerk at a well-known West-end hotel much frequented by gentlemen of a horsey turn of mind. His frank, pleasing manners soon won him the friendship of the habitués. and there were few of them but

had a word for him; and as the only thing upon which they ever conversed was horseracing, it followed that Herbert heard more about "morals," "dead certainties," and "straight tips" than anything else.

The hotel bar was close to Herbert's desk, and at certain hours there was always a little knot of men standing there and discussing their losses and their gains.

The customers of this hotel were well-to-do men, many of whom made their living on the turf, and were never slow to refer to their good fortune.

For a long time the young man took little notice of the conversation, but a circumstance happened which brought the smallness of his present income home to him, and made him wish that he could make a pile of golden sovereigns as easily as the merry gentlemen who patronised the hotel.

He fell in love.

A young cousin of his came up from the country to go into a London shop, and lodged with Herbert's mother. Herbert went home at night and found his evenings pleasanter than they had ever been before, for Marion—pretty Marion North—was there to chat with him, to laugh at his jokes and stories, and now and then to sing one of the sweet old-fashioned country songs which brought the tears to the mother's eyes, and made Herbert think he had never heard anything so beautiful before.

Marion was nineteen—Herbert was two-and-twenty—what more natural than that, flung nightly into each other's society, a feeling warmer than friendship should spring upbetween them?

The course of true love ran smoothly enough, and at last these thoughtless young people agreed to get married.

Herbert had his salary at the hotel, and Marion's situation

at the West-end draper's brought her in a little. They arranged it all very nicely, and really nothing could have looked more promising. Their united income would be something over fifty shillings a week, and they both had their meals given them where they worked, so really there was only the rent of two nice little cheap rooms and Sunday's dinner to provide.

The more the young lovers talked the future over, the brighter it appeared. In fact, it appeared so very bright that they determined to get married at once.

It was a quiet little wedding—just the two principals, Herbert's mother, and a friend of Marion's—one of the girls from the shop—but it was a very happy one; and Herbert, who had obtained two whole days' holiday, wondered, if his first quarter of a honeymoon was so sweet, what a full moon of that sort could be like.

For nearly two years Herbert and Marion Blair were happy. They both kept their situations, and the daily separation lent an additional charm to the quiet evenings together and the long pleasant Sundays.

Towards the end of the second year the family party was increased by one, and then, when Herbert and Marion went over to see old Mrs. Blair, there was a little bundle that they took it in turn to carry, and the contents of that bundle always sent the old lady into ecstacies, for she would hug it and kiss it, and say "Did'ums, then!" to it, just as though she were a four-year-old lassie with her first doll.

It was when the baby was about three months old that the first great trouble came to the Blairs. The child was taken seriously ill. The mother, who had been compelled to give up her situation to attend to it, sat up with it night after might, hoping against hope that God would spare her little

Herbert to her. In those black days Herbert the elder would come home pale and worried from his work, and his heart would sink within him as he opened the front door gently, and stole up the stairs to the room where all his earthly treasures were. He would look at his wife's face for news, but there was never a ray of hope to cheer him.

"No better," said the mournful shake of the head the poor mother gave; and then Herbert would go to the little crib where the sick baby lay, and look at it with tearful eyes and throbbing throat, and wonder if nothing could be done to save it.

One night Herbert came home, and went up into the room as usual, but could read nothing in Marion's face, for it was buried in her hands as she knelt beside a little crib and moaned. That was Herbert's first great trial, when he looked upon the dead face of his first-born, and heard his Marion wailing over her bonnie boy, and, like Rachel, refusing to be comforted.

The anxiety, the long vigils, the broken rest, and the grief of a heartbroken mother did their work, and soon it was with a heavier heart still that Herbert Blair came in sight of his home when his day's work was done. Marion lay ill now. Her constitution, never overstrong, had broken down. Her lungs were delicate, and she required the utmost care, and many delicacies which were beyond the reach of Herbert's slender purse.

The old day-dream, you see, had not been realised. There is something more to provide for when you get married than the rent of two rooms and a Sunday's dinner. And now Marion was earning nothing and requiring much, and what little the young couple had put by had all gone over poor baby.

Herbert began to know now what a responsibility a man undertakes when he asks a girl to link her life and fortune with his. It drove him to distraction to see his Marion wasting away, and growing weaker and weaker, when he knew that good medical advice, good living and care, would set her on her feet again.

O the curse of being poor !—to have the true heart to love, the willing arm to aid our dear ones, and yet to be held back, powerless and helpless, for lack of a little gold!—to see the wife and the child that money would save die for the lack of it, while under our tortured eyes the heartless and the reckless squander the price of a hundred lives over a whim or a wanton!

Herbert, at the end of his resources, with a doctor's bill still unpaid, with many little bills still unsettled, knew that on an outlay of some twenty pounds depended the life of his young wife.

The medical man who attended her told him plainly enough how it would end. It was a bleak and cold spring in London; the house they lived in was draughty and unhealthy. What Marion must have was a few weeks at some southerly part of the coast, where the air was suited to weak lungs, and there she must have just what she fancied to eat and drink—little tempting delicacies, all of which cost money.

It was torture to Herbert Blair to hear this, and to feel that in all the world there was no one to whom he could turn in his trouble and raise the money. If he could only get it, he would work himself to the bone to repay it.

He thought of his mother, who lived by letting her little house out in apartments, but he knew times had been very bad with her lately, and she had hard work to earn the rent and live as well.

But he went to her as a last resource, and out of their conversation grew a scheme which was a desperate one, but which promised help. The old lady knew as well as the doctor that her daughter-in-law's only chance was change and good living, and she loved her son's wife almost as much as she idolised her son. She would have given her heart's blood to save her boy a pang of sorrow, and she did eventually what was almost as dangerous a thing to attempt.

She gave a bill of sale on the furniture of her little home to secure a loan of £20, which Herbert obtained from a gentleman who advertised his willingness to advance large or small sums at an hour's notice, repayable by easy instalments.

Herbert pulled a very long face when he found how the interest and the charges mounted up, and what a big instalment it was he would have to pay every month. But he had the money, and he could send Marion away, and that was the great thing. They had some friends at Bournemouth who were willing to receive Mrs. Blair for a small weekly payment, and Herbert had the great joy one afternoon of seeing her off by the train, and, with love in his eyes and hope in his heart, bidding her come back with the roses in her cheeks.

Marion got slowly better. Herbert left his apartments, and went to live with his mother, sleeping on a sofa in the kitchen, doing anything so that he might save out of his small salary enough to pay the instalments of the bill of sale regularly.

The first he paid on the day it was due. The second he

could not quite make up to the time; but two days after it was due he had the money, and sent it off by post.

That afternoon, sitting in 'he office of the hotel, he was alarmed to see his mother, agitated and red-eyed, coming along the hall towards him. Her errand was told in a few words. At noon that day the loan-office people had put the brokers in.

Herbert obtained an hour's leave, and tore off there and then like a madman to the loan office.

What did they mean by it?

Nothing. It was their rule, that was all. The instalment was twenty-four hours overdue, and, when that was the case, they always seized. The object of a bill of sale was to enable such steps to be taken. If they did not enforce the provisoes of the security given they would never get a loan repaid at all.

"But I sent it off to you this morning!"

"Too late," said the polite manager. "Too late. The brokers had been sent, and the expenses incurred."

"What shall I have to do?" said Herbert.

"Pay the money and the expenses, and we will take the man out," was the answer.

Herbert, finding he could gain nothing, left the office in despair.

As he was doing so, one of the clerks ran after him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the clerk, "but if you want this bill paid out, I think I can tell you where you can get the money."

"Where?" asked Herbert, eagerly.

The clerk handed him a card. It was the address of a money-lender at the West-end. Thither Herbert sped, and saw the principal. Nothing was easier. If the furniture

was good security the West-end gentleman would lend enough on it to pay off his predecessor, costs and all.

The furniture was sufficient, and next day all was arranged satisfactorily. The West-end gentleman paid up the original loan and a swindling bill of costs and expenses, which came to nearly five pounds, and finally Mrs. Blair found herself liable on a bill of sale for £38, for which her son in the original instance had had £20. It is needless, perhaps, to say that the two firms belonged to the same person, and that all over the country loan-offices play into each other's hands in this way. The object of a seizure is in nine cases out of ten to get a year's interest at 60 per cent. paid for a loan which has only run two months, and to force the victim to borrow the amount again at once, and enter into a bond for 60 per cent. more, besides paying extortionate seizure fees and expenses, which go into the money-lender's pocket.

There are hundreds of homes wrecked, hundreds of families beggared, and hundreds of men driven to dishonesty weekly by this infamous system; and the law protects the harpies, and is the catspaw which takes the chestnuts from the hot bars of justice for them.

The end in Herbert Blair's case was only the end in hundreds of other cases.

Crippled in his resources, worried and ill, with a sick wife, and a mother now whose all depended on his being able to pay a certain sum monthly—a sum so large that it left him insufficient to meet his current expenses—what wonder that he grew desperate!

He listened eagerly to the conversation of the betting men now, and dreamed about strokes of luck and sudden wealth. One day a customer gave him a "certainty"—a horse that on the morrow was bound to win, and was at 20 to 1. Just then his third instalment was due, and he hadn't the cash to meet it. The sum he needed was £2 10s. That day he took five pounds of the hotel money—borrowed it for a day or two. Half he sent off to meet his instalment, and half he put on the horse that was sure to win.

The horse finished last in the race, and Herbert's heart almost stood still as he read the telegram posted in the hall.

To replace the money was impossible. All he could do was to endeavour to conceal his crime. To do that he had to falsify the books. To screen the false entry from being detected, he had to forge the signature of the directors of the hotel to a voucher. One deceit led to another, and at last, in his wild endeavour to keep himself from shame and his dear ones from ruin, he had rendered himself liable to penal servitude.

Of course he was detected at last. The house of cards toppled down, and all was ruin and desolation.

Five years' penal servitude! The judge told him such crimes as his were getting far too common; in the interests of society they must be checked. Five years' penal servitude was given to Herbert Blair as an example. Did he not deserve it? He had sinned, and he must bear the penalty. It was his righteous doom; and the woman who heard that sentence given, and was borne senseless past the dock where he stood, was Marion, his wife.

* * * * *

Do you know what convict life is, any of you, my readers? God forbid! It is a life that degrades a man lower than the beast—a life made the most hideous and repulsive to those who are the most innocent sinners. Gaol

birds, thieves, and swindlers, who thieve and swindle systematically and stolidly, do not suffer one-tenth of the punishment which falls on those who have yielded to sudden temptation and have still the vestige of a heart left to them. The old offenders are up to all the plants and dodges; they know how to curry favour with the warders, the doctor, and the chaplain, and how to evade every restriction. These men improve the shining hour, even in penal servitude, and many a burglary which startles society is plotted and planned in Millbank and Portland. But to natures like Herbert Blair's, convict life is a thousand times more horrible than any boasted torture of the old Inquisition.

Slowly but surely the young man broke under the shame and the degrading treatment.

Because he was a greenhorn he did not know how to please the warders, or how to avoid giving them offence. He was constantly a scapegoat. If tobacco was found it was traced to Blair—purposely planted on him to shield the real offender. If a warder wanted to show his vigilance it was generally Blair, or some poor devil like him, who was selected to be reported for breach of rules. Each breach involves a lengthening of the term of imprisonment, and in this way three months was added to the unhappy man's purgatory.

News from the outer world came to him at intervals. The old mother and the young wife, for whose sakes he had sinned, were bearing the blow as bravely as they could, but the shock had fatally injured Marion's health, and at last the convict began to count the days to his freedom, hungering to see his wife once more ere the fatal disease had borne her beyond his clasp.

A week before his time expired he heard from outside

that she was worse, and that his mother, broken down by misfortune, had drifted so low that the workhouse stared her in the face.

"Thank God!" cried the young man, "in a week I shall be free—free to work for them to help to save them."

That very night there was smoking in a cell. The real offender was an old gaol bird, who toadied to the warder, and sneaked to him, and laughed at his jokes. The smoking was bound to be reported, and put down to someone.

It was put down to Blair, and reported the next morning to the governor. Blair denied it, and declared it was a plot of the warder.

"Oh, indeed!" said that worthy, whipping his hand into Blair's pocket, and pulling out a small piece of tobacco; "why, here's some of it!"

It was a "plant." The officer thrust in the tobacco to find it. Blair was a "mark," and such things are by no means uncommon in our convict prisons. The proof satisfied the governor, and Blair was ordered to remain in prison a fortnight longer for such a glaring breach of the rules as smoking and having tobacco concealed.

That afternoon, while being taken from his cell, which was on the top landing, the convict, mad with despair, his last hope crushed of seeing his young wife alive, darted suddenly to the balustrade, and, leaping over, fell with a thud upon the stone flags below, bruised and battered, motionless and dead.

Let us not, lest we be accused of sympathy with evildoing and of sham sentimentality, offer a word of sympathy for this sinner against society, or question the righteousness of his doom.

No. XII.

DEAD AND ALIVE.

It was a cold, tempestuous winter afternoon, and Charlie Pendered, commercial traveller, sat looking out of the window of a first-class carriage, as his train rushed through bleak and desolate scenery to its destination in the far North, feeling supremely uncomfortable.

He was cold, he was angry, he was miserable. He had parted on bad terms with his wife on the previous day, he was worried and pressed for money by ravenous creditors who had no bowels of compassion, and he had been an utter failure as far as commercial travelling was concerned.

This journey to the North was the first he had made for the firm on whose behalf he was now travelling, and as, beyond his expenses, he was only to have a commission on the actual business done, Charlie was not very sanguine of doing himself much good.

He was the last man in the world who ought to have turned bagman. He was a sensitive, nervous, delicatelynurtured young man, who, up to his one-and-twentieth birthday, had never earned a penny, but had always cherished the idea that his forte was literature.

He had written one or two little stories, and sent them in to periodicals, and they had been printed, but they had never brought him twopence, the class of journals accepting work from "outsiders" generally considering the honour of appearing in print sufficient remuneration.

Charlie Pendered would have gone on writing stories

for nothing and living at home with his father for years, perhaps, if two events had not happened which altered the complexion of affairs.

Charlie fell in love with and married Miss Coralie De Lorme, a remarkably pretty young lady, who, like the famous heroine of comic song,

> Danced on her toes, And wore spangled clothes,

in the crowded ranks of the ballet at the Royal Alhambra Theatre. No one could say a word against Coralie De Lorme, except that her real name was Carrie Smith. worked very hard, not, as poets always make ballet-girls work, to keep an aged mother, but to contribute to the family treasury. Her father was an unlucky actor, who had about one month's engagement per annum, and her mother had been a governess; but they had fallen on evil days, and all they were able to give their little daughter was a decent education at home, and to get her taught dancing and singing in the hope of getting her on to the stage in burlesques and pantomimes. The singing was a failure, but at the dancing Carrie made good progress. That being her only accomplishment, she was put in the ballet, and stopped there, working up gradually from the East-end to the Alhambra. It was not at the theatre Charlie met her, but at the house of an old pro, who lived in Packingtonstreet, and was a friend of the Smith family. Charlie used to go and smoke pipes with this old fellow-a Bohemian mummer of an almost extinct school-and take great delight in listening to his stories of the stage, metropolitan and provincial, in the good old days before duchesses' sons took to low comedy, and fashionable beauties hinted a desire to go on at a regular "show" for a weekly salary.

Who can account for the mysterious influences which attract men and women to each other, and end in what is known in drawing-room dialect as a *mésalliance?* Why do rich women marry poor men? Why do handsome men marry ugly women? Why do earls wed housemaids, and aged millionairesses lead blushing boys to the altar?

I'm sure I can't say, and I don't know that I need trouble to find out. I know that Charlie Pendered, well born, quiet, and highly cultured, fell in love with and married Carrie Smith, alias Miss Coralie De Lorme, of the Royal Alhambra ballet, and that his father, an irascible old gentleman, swore when he heard the news as terribly as our armies did in Flanders, and shut the door in his son's face, telling him to do the best he could, for while he lived no money of his should go towards assisting a Pendered ménage that had a ballet-girl in it.

Then Charlie, having a wife, and declining to allow that wife to stand on her toes and pirouette in short skirts any longer, found it necessary to do something himself, and took the only berth which he could get.

He started as a commercial traveller in town, and it was his duty to walk into hairdressers' shops and persuade the principal that the hair restorer manufactured by the firm he represented was the finest hair restorer in the world. But Charlie didn't do very well at the game. He was nervous and retiring, and if he entered a shop, and the master mistook him for a customer, and was polite, Charlie hadn't the pluck to say he didn't want to buy, but to sell,—so, in answer to the "What can I do for you, sir?" he would mutter, "A sixpenny tooth-brush, please," or "A pot of bear's grease," put down his money, and walk out of the shop like a lamb.

You can easily imagine that Charlie didn't keep that place long, or make much money. He had thirty shillings a week salary, and he spent half that in bear's grease and tooth-brushes.

He tried the wine trade next, and gave it up in despair, convinced that he should become a confirmed drunkard. Three weeks at the business landed the young gentleman within a measurable distance of delirium tremens, for he always found himself tasting other people's wines instead of selling his own.

During this time poor Carrie was moping at home. She fancied she had married a gentleman of independent means, and she was really very fond of Charlie, so that when she found his father had quarrelled with him, and that he would have to earn his living, all through her, she was very much distressed.

Things, however, got a little brighter by-and-by, for, pleased with young Pendered's manners and appearance, a firm in the City took him on as their regular traveller, at a salary and all expenses paid. But he had to leave his home, and travel all over the country, sometimes being away two whole months at a stretch; and this made poor Carrie feel very lonely and miserable, especially in the long evenings. It was in these lonely hours that she would think of the tinsel, the gaiety, and colour of the old stage life, and sometimes she would have given the world to have passed through the old stage-door, trotted into the crowded dressing-room, put on her ballet costume, and have bounded on to the boards to the sound of the merry music. But it was no good thinking of that. She was Mrs. Charles Pendered now, and her husband was a gentleman, and some day, when his father was in a good temper, Charlie would be

able to give up the nasty travelling, and then they would be big swells.

While Charlie was away on these long journeys he too had time to think, and, absent from the graces and charms that had won him, he sometimes found himself wondering if he wasn't paying too heavy a penalty for being the lawful husband of a pretty ballet-girl. Of course, she was a nice girl, well educated, and ladylike—like Esther Eccles, who married George D'Alroy, only George D'Alroy didn't have to travel in hair-dye and wine and soap and blacklead, and all that sort of thing, in order to support his wife.

Given two beings, one male and one female, married to each other, each discontented, and each brooding over the idea of having made a sacrifice in the other's interest, the ultimate result is inevitable. Vesuvius slumbers long, but the torrent of lava bursts forth at last. The domestic Vesuvius of the Pendered ménage slumbered long, but at last the inevitable eruption occurred. Charlie was home from a journey which had convinced him he was a duffer. The firm had given him a month's salary in lieu of notice, and a little kindly advice to try some other vocation in life than that of commercial travelling. Carrie had been offered an engagement for a provincial pantomime, where she was to be première danseuse, and wear a most beautiful dress, and have the limelight all to herself, with three changes of colour, and Charlie insisted upon her refusing the offer.

Then they had a row. The slumbering volcano erupted furiously. Charlie gave vent to his grievances, and Carrie to hers. Both of them had made a great mistake. Each had sacrificed a career. As the reproaches grew more personal, the heat of the lava increased, and at last the

stream of recrimination was of that scorching character calculated to raise mental blisters on those over whom it poured.

To a big row succeeded a long sulk; and when, a day or two later, poor Charlie started on a forlorn hope on a journey to the North as a commercial traveller on commission, he was thoroughly wretched and miserable. He and Carrie parted like naughty children who have quarrelled—neither would give in, or be the first to kiss, and so with a cold "good-bye" the young couple shook hands. Charlie went off to the station and started North; and Carrie watched his cab off from the window, and then went into her bed-room and had a good cry

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The train went whirling along on its wild journey. The weather was bitterly cold, the wind was blowing a hurricane. Charlie, sitting back in the carriage, tired out with many weary hours of travel, thought of the great mistake he had made, and wondered how this foolish marriage would end.

After all, why should he bother himself like this? He had repented—Carrie had repented. Why shouldn't they separate? Carrie could earn her own living, and she evidently wanted to. Why the dickens, in order to support her against her will, should he go rushing about selling soap to Scotchmen? He wouldn't. He'd go back home. His samples had all been sent on to the town he was to start from, where his firm had an agency—let them stop there. He would go back home. At the next station Charlie, acting on the impulse, and now utterly reckless, got out of the train, went straight to the best hotel, ordered a good dinner, and determined to enjoy himself. In his hurry to throw up his appointment, his mind had risen

above petty details. His portmanteau was in the luggage van, and he had never claimed it.

That evening, while Charlie Pendered sat in the warm, well-lighted coffee-room of his hotel, the train he had left sped on its way. It never reached the terminus it was bound for. That evening, long to be remembered in the annals of disaster, a famous bridge gave way, and the train, with its living freight, was hurled down into the stormy waters beneath.

Only one wild shriek rent the darkness of the night as the cruel waters closed over their prey, and the next morning the whole country rang with the ghastly news.

Charlie Pendered heard it, and he held his peace. A wild idea had flashed across his mind. To all intents and purposes he was in the ill-fated train. He had taken his ticket for the station across the water, his portmanteau was in the train, and he was expected by it on the other side. Hitherto his life had been a mistake. Here, then, was a chance to begin a new one. Charlie Pendered had perished in the "Great Bridge Disaster"; his father would not grieve, his wife would be rid of a chain that galled her, and he would be able to make a fresh start in the world.

The idea fascinated him. All that was romantic and morbid in his nature concentrated itself round the idea. Yes, he would let the world believe him dead. For all but himself he slept the last sleep at the bottom of the Tay, or out in the far ocean, where the stream had borne him.

The money in his possession was just enough to take him out of the country, and keep him for a while. He would make a fresh start without encumbrance, but not as a commercial traveller. That day he sailed from Glasgow for Rotterdam, and up in London his father and his wife mourned him as dead.

His name was published among the passengers by the ill-fated train; he never reached Dundee, his portmanteau was washed up, and all doubt was at an end.

Though his body was never recovered, it was beyond all question that Charles Pendered's earthly career had been closed by the dark waters of the Tay. There was a vacancy for a commercial traveller in the soap line, and Miss Coralie De Lorme, late of the Royal Alhambra ballet, was a widow.

* * * * *

A play had been produced at a London theatre, and its authorship was shrouded in mystery. That alone was an advertisement for it, but there was another element of success in it apart from its intrinsic merit; a small part had, by the talents of a hitherto unknown actress, been lifted into prominence. The critics raved about Miss Caroline Smith. Her portrait appeared in the illustrated theatrical papers, and folks began to ask where she had been, and what she had done before.

There was a whisper that she was the daughter of an actor, but had hitherto been in the ballet. The same whisper said that she had lost her husband, and after his death had studied hard in order to get a speaking part upon the stage.

Whoever she was, Miss Caroline Smith was a great success. So was the play, and the more people talked about it the less seemed to be known about the author.

At last it crept out that he was living abroad—in Germany—and that for some time past he had been contributing largely to periodical literature, and was making money. But no one had ever seen him.

Miss Smith, the new actress, was of course delighted with her triumph, and in her quiet little home, where she lived with her mother and father, she read the laudatory notices of the Press over one by one, and yet she sighed. She was thinking of one whom she had dearly loved—her young husband, snatched from her by a terrible accident in the first year of their married life.

They had parted in anger, never to meet again. He had left her with cold words on his lips, and gone to his death.

Oh, how she had thought of it all a hundred times since then! If he could only have known how she really loved him, and how she had cried her eyes out directly his back was turned!

Now, when, after many difficulties, she had at last fought her way into a respectable position on the stage—now, when she was no longer a little ballet-girl, but an actress, acknowledged to be an artist by the Press, he could not know it. She fancied how different things would have been if he could have been by now to read all the beautiful notices, and see what Coralie of the first row at the Alhambra had blossomed into.

Mr. Pendered, senior, had been really distressed by the news of his son's death, and had made the *amende honorable* by offering a helping hand to the widow. But she was too proud to accept it. She answered bitterly that but for his father's enmity Charlie might have been alive now; and his repentance came too late.

The old gentleman took it very much to heart, but he was too proud to let his chagrin be seen. He shut himself up with his books and his curiosities—he was a great collector of coins and old editions—and quietly made his

will in favour of his daughter-in-law, determined that he would be as generous to the dead as he had been unjust to the living.

Charles Pendered, the commercial traveller, had been drowned in the Tay, so that, of course, we have nothing to do with him; but there was a gentleman about this time—an Englishman—living in Dresden, who came there very hard up soon after the famous accident, got a berth as interpreter at one of the big hotels, and after a while left to go and live in cheap lodgings, and pass his time in filling sheets and sheets of paper with writing. These he sent away by post to England. Some of them came back again, but some did not. In their place there came a registered letter.

This gentleman in time moved from the cheap lodgings to better ones; but still he was always scribbling on sheets of paper, which he numbered and flung on the floor as fast as he finished them.

He had one friend, a young German student, who visited him, and to this friend he communicated the fact that he was gradually making a name in literature. "And I want a name badly," he added with a laugh.

It was to this young student that the writing Englishman one day communicated the fact that a play of his had been accepted at a London theatre, and that he was to have £3 a night for it.

When the play came out, and was a great success, the German student said to his friend, "You have made the name at last. Now will you not go over and see your play?"

There was a strange look on the author's face. "I don't know what to do," he said. "I should like to go and see

it, but there are many reasons why I don't care to go to London."

"Ah, something in the past?"

" Yes."

But at last the desire to see the play he had written performed, the longing to listen to the laughter and to drink in the applause, was too strong for the young writer, and he determined to go. The night before his departure he sat late over the fire in his sitting-room, and thought of the past and of the future. Fortune was before him now—a fortune which he had no one to share with him. Once he had a wife—in a moment of mad folly he had divorced himself and committed suicide.

He was a dead man. Perhaps over in England there was a gravestone in a churchyard with his name upon it. What had become of his wife? She, too, might be dead—married again, perhaps. The burthen of a buried existence began to weigh upon him now. He wanted to claim his own identity again, to rise from the grave where he had lain so long, and take his place among the living.

"I dread this journey," he said to himself as he took his seat in the mail in the morning. "Goodness knows how it will end! I feel like a ghost going to frighten the living."

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It was the hundredth night of the famous play in which Miss Caroline Smith had made such a triumph.

Before the curtain rose it was whispered about in the dressing-rooms that the mysterious author had at last turned up, and that he was in a stage-box.

The curtain rose, and the play proceeded uninterruptedly till the second act, in which Miss Smith first comes on the scene. The actress came tripping on, and, just as she was about to speak her first line, glanced towards the box where the mysterious author sat.

There was a shriek from the stage, and a cry from the box!

Then the curtain was lowered, for the actress had swooned on the stage.

She had recognised in the author of the play the ghost of her husband who was killed in the terrible railway accident!

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Is it necessary I should tell you what followed? How there was a complete reconciliation; how husband and wife were now proud of each other, and how freely Charlie was forgiven for the ghastly trick which, in a wild moment, he had played upon those who loved him. Nor was the father less delighted than the widow to welcome back the lost one, returned, as it were, from the dead. To-day there is no happier couple than the author husband and the actress wife. Fortune has smiled upon them since, and it will be a long time before Charlie Pendered, who has quietly assumed his own name, and had his gravestone knocked down, will want to play at being dead again.

There is nothing very wonderful in this story. The most remarkable thing about it is that it is perfectly true.

No. XIII.

THE BACK HILL TRAGEDY.

THERE is a house in Eaton-square which no Italian organ-grinder passes without obliging the inmates with a tune.

The house is the residence of Viscount Sandstone, a young peer who, having rank and long descent, but very little money, sought to supply the deficiency by taking a wife who had plenty.

He was a lucky fellow to get wealth and beauty together, but he did. Lucia Spaglietti, the only daughter and heiress of old Carlo Spaglietti, the wealthiest Italian merchant in London, was one of the sensations of the season, and Viscount Sandstone at one time felt uneasy about his chance of winning the prize.

It was by no means a walk over, for an old marquis ran the Viscount very hard in old Carlo Spaglietti's good graces. Lucia, however, had a voice in the matter, and as Sandstone was a good-looking fellow and an agreeable companion, while the old marquis hadn't a tooth or an idea in his head, the young lady decided in favour of the former.

It was a mariage de convenance undoubtedly, but for all that there was a little sentiment about it. Both the young people might have done worse—Sandstone with his rank, and Lucia with her money, and they settled down into a fairly affectionate couple.

Directly the marriage was announced, of course the Society journals began to let off paragraphs. Old Spaglietti's wealth became a topic of conversation, and several hints were thrown out that the future viscountess could supply Darwin's missing link, and trace her descent back to a monkey.

This was, of course, only one of those spiteful jokes in which society is so fond of indulging.

What it meant was, that Carlo Spaglietti, the fair Viscountess's wealthy papa, had made his début on English soil with an organ and a monkey; and though gossips, repeating the rumour, believed it to be only a malicious invention, it was, as a matter of fact, perfectly true.

Many years ago there had lain at death's door in an Italian village an old peasant. He had called his sons Carlo and Risotto to his side and given them a little sound advice. That was all he had to bestow upon his heirs, and having given it he died.

The lads, who had hitherto earned a precarious livelihood with their father, found themselves cast upon their own resources. They decided to wander away, and try their luck in foreign countries. They bade each other goodbye, and set out, and in course of time Carlo turned up in London with a monkey and an organ, and Risotto might have been seen playing a violin in the courtyards of the Paris hotels.

Risotto was a fair musician, and Carlo an indifferent one; but if the latter had no artistic talent, he had something infinitely better—viz., business capabilities; and he had not been in London long before he saw a means of advancing a step.

By starving himself for a year or two, and perhaps by

cheating his padrone, Carlo managed to save a little money, and became a padrone himself, doing an extensive business in the importation of Italian children. Carlo, however, was not contented with his position, and sought in a good marriage a means of improving it. There was an old Italian named Jacobi, who kept a liquor shop much frequented by the Saffron-hill ladies and gentlemen, and there was Signorina Jacobi, who was the old man's daughter. Carlo managed to get into the old man's good graces, and to win the daughter's hand and a decent dowry, for old Jacobi was the money-lender of the district, as well as the restaurateur; and many a time in his little back room would the fierce Italian oaths ring over the earnings of a week gambled away.

Jacobi was always there to find more money for the losers on the best security they could give, and many were the tales of the wealth which the old fox had squeezed out of vagabond organ-grinders, drunken padrones, and the petty Italian tradesmen of the famous colony.

He had made enough to give his new son-in-law the capital to make a big start in trade. At that time the looking-glass and barometer trades were entirely in the hands of Italians, who started shops all over the country, and in nearly all cases prospered.

Carlo Spaglietti gave up the importation of children, and started as a manufacturer and importer of mirrors in Hattongarden, and from the first the business was successful. As his capital increased, so did he find fresh means of investing it, and soon added money-lending and bill-discounting to his other occupations.

As his fortunes advanced so did his ambition. Saffronhill was to him a memory of the past. With the proverbial care of a foreigner, he acquired the veneer which it is necessary that the wealthy man should wear in society. He had his suburban villa now, and his wife was quite the lady, with servants at her call and a carriage and pair at her command when she had a mind to take the air.

Soon the suburban villa became too small, for company began to flock to the wealthy Italian's house. To bill-discounting he had added Stock Exchange speculation, and also charity, which is perhaps the most remunerative of all speculative businesses.

Carlo Spaglietti received a decoration from Victor Emmanuel in connection with a new Italian railway which the ancient organ-grinder was largely instrumental in financing, and after that he dropped easily into a place in what is sometimes called the "money ring."

At any rate, his name was found connected with some of the luckiest financial speculations of the day.

The looking-glass business was sold, and Carlo Spaglietti was more generally alluded to as the wealthy Italian banker than anything else. He had his mansion in Mayfair now, and his country seat. His dinner parties were famous, and his wife's dances well patronised. The golden key had opened the last gate of all, and the Spagliettis found themselves cordially received at the houses of the highest in the land.

Do not imagine that amid all this sunshine there had been no shadow. Carlo Spaglietti had not become a millionaire without having his troubles. One of them, occurring early in the days of his prosperity, had marred his whole future life, and robbed the gold that came rolling into his coffers of half its value to him. He had no heir to all his vast property—no son to carry on

the business and make the name of Spaglietti famous in the future.

Yet a son and a daughter had been born to him. The daughter had grown up into a beautiful girl, but the son had met with a strange fate.

When the boy was barely four years old he was lost—how no one could say. The nurse, a dark-eyed Italian girl, had taken her charge out for a walk one day, and had come rushing back in an hour, hot and terrified, to say that the child had been lost. He was standing by her side while she looked into a shop window, and holding her dress. When she went to move through the crowd, the child had disappeared.

From that hour, in spite of every exertion on the father's part, no trace of the lost Carlo Spaglietti had ever been found, and Lucia was the sole heiress to all his wealth.

One other trouble had the ancient organ-grinder. His brother Risotto had turned out badly. He had become mixed up with the worst class of Italian adventurers in Paris, and had squandered all the money his talent as a musician brought him in vice and dissipation.

Risotto found out by accident that his brother Carlo was making money, and came over to London, dirty and drunken, to try and get assistance.

What he obtained from Carlo he squandered in a week. Not only did he fling his money into the gutter, a sight which sent a knife into the careful Carlo's heart, but he made himself exceedingly objectionable.

His dirty and dissipated Bohemianism detracted from the brother's respectability, and when he could not have as much as he wanted he became violent, and made himself as objectionable as possible.

At last Carlo was goaded to desperation. After parting with large amounts to Risotto, only to know that they would be squandered among bad characters, he determined for his own sake to stop the drain once and for all.

Risotto had not been circumspect in the Italian colony concerning his adventures, and some of the secrets he had babbled out in his cups came to Carlo's ears.

One of them was enough to furnish Carlo with a weapon. The next time Risotto came he received a hundred pounds and an intimation that he should leave the country at once and trouble his brother no more.

If he did not a little secret would be communicated to the Paris police, who might come and fetch him back to France at the country's expense.

Risotto flung back his long, greasy hair, showed his fine white teeth, and poured out a volley of Italian oaths. But he saw his brother was determined. He took the hundred pounds and departed, vowing vengeance.

Carlo saw no more of his brother. It was about a month after that his little son was mysteriously stolen, and he at first put the deed down to his brother's malice. He had the brother traced to Paris, but no clue was found to the child.

When Viscount Sandstone proposed for the hand of Lucia Spaglietti, of course a certain portion of the story had to be told him.

If the long-lost son, who would now have grown to man's estate, should ever turn up, he would have a claim on his father's wealth which his father would certainly be willing to allow, and anyone who married Lucia must do so knowing that she would only be her father's sole successor in the event of Carlo continuing absent.

"I do not believe that I shall ever see my son again," said the old gentleman, "and my wife, who never forgot her little child, died firmly convinced that in heaven she should find him waiting for her. But, as there is no proof of his death, I must tell you this."

The Viscount was quite willing to accept the contingency. It wasn't very likely that a son who had been missing for over twenty years would trouble them now. The chances are, if the young man was alive, he was far away, and didn't even know his own name. Probably he had been stolen for his clothes, and either been taken in at a workhouse, or taken on tramp by gipsies, who had no idea of his identity.

So Sandstone married the Italian heiress, troubling himself very little about the possibility of her having a brother, and the Viscountess was an ornament to her new position, which her father's wealth, passing to her altogether on his death a year later, made a very brilliant one indeed.

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There had been a murder committed in a low Italian den in Back-hill.

There had been a quarrel and a scuffle, knives had been drawn, and an old man, Giuseppe Torini, had fallen mortally wounded.

Carried to the hospital, he was asked if he knew his assailant, and he had answered, "Yes; it was Spaglietti!"

The young man called Spaglietti was arrested, and witnesses came forward to prove that they had seen him draw a knife, and that he, Spaglietti, had been close to the murdered man.

The young man, a comely-looking fellow, in spite of his rags and unkempt hair, swore that he had drawn the knife

in defence of his own life, but had never struck a blow with it, and was innocent.

In the hospital the man calling himself Giuseppe Torini died. The name of Spaglietti was common enough in the Italian colony, and people reading the case in the newspapers remembered that the great Italian banker whose daughter had married Viscount Sandstone had also been a Spaglietti; but that was nothing. There is a Leopold Rothschild in Petticoat-lane who sells fried fish.

The strongest circumstantial evidence was brought against young Spaglietti, and he was found guilty and condemned to death.

In the course of his trial his history had been revealed, and it was not devoid of romance.

The man Torini had bought him, he believed, from his parents when he was quite young, and had sold him again to a padrone in Paris. He had played about the streets with his master, and been taught to dance with another child, who also went with the music.

When he was about fourteen the man Torini had claimed him again, and since then he had worked for him. Torini had told him his father was Risotto Spaglietti. Inquiries of the Paris police made during the trial showed that Risotto Spaglietti was a bad character, and was wanted by the Continental police for a robbery and attempted murder committed many years ago. There was no doubt that the young Italian came of a bad stock. It was also proved that there was no love lost between Torini and himself. Torini was a hard taskmaster, and cheated the young man besides, swearing at him and showing his dislike for him in many ways. Enough bad blood was proved to give a motive 107 the murder, and the judge, in summing up, clearly indicated

to the jury that the weight of evidence was against the prisoner.

On the morning after the verdict had been pronounced an old Italian woman called at Eaton-square, and implored to be allowed to see the Viscountess.

The fair Lucia was well known for her benevolence to her distressed countrymen and women, and, thinking it was someone in need of assistance, gave orders that she should be admitted.

The interview was not long, but when the old Italian woman went away the beautiful Viscountess was white as death, and trembling like an aspen leaf.

It was a terrible story the old woman had to tell. She was the nurse who had lost little Carlo Spaglietti. To-day, for the first time, she had confessed the secret which had been a burthen on her conscience for years.

To-day, for the first time, she told the horrified peeress that she had received gold from Risotto Spaglietti to let him take the child, in order to wreak his vengeance upon his brother. To-day she revealed the ghastly fact that Torini, the murdered man, was this same Risotto Spaglietti, the Viscountess's uncle, and that the young Italian lying under sentence of death, supposed to be Risotto's son, was really the stolen Carlo, heir to the Italian banker's wealth, and brother-in-law to a peer.

The Viscount was horrified at the news which his wife brought him. It was all very well to marry for money, but he had never anticipated that he would find a brother-inlaw an Italian organ-grinder sentenced to be hanged.

He re-read the case now with an interest he had not felt in it before. The more he read of it the more certain he felt that his brother-in-law was innocent, and that it was one of those cases in which circumstantial evidence had deceived the jury.

He promised the terrified Lucia that every effort should be made to save her brother from the gallows, and he instantly set to work to sift the facts.

In a week a certain amount of success had rewarded his effort, and, without appearing too prominently in the matter, he had managed to enlist a considerable amount of sympathy for young Spaglietti, and several prominent Italians, resident in this country, took the case up.

The Home Secretary was applied to by Sandstone, and the facts of the case were laid before him. He gave the matter long consideration, but saw no ground for delaying the date of the execution.

Sandstone was in despair, and his wife was almost frantic. At last the young peer, swallowing his pride, had a private interview, and told the Home Secretary, who was a personal friend of his, exactly how the matter stood.

"My dear fellow," said the Minister, "I'm awfully sorry for you, but what can I do?"

"I'm sure he's innocent," answered the Viscount"Couldn't he go mad in his cell, and be ordered to be confined during her Majesty's pleasure? Then he could easily be allowed to escape."

The Home Secretary smiled. "I know that has been done formerly," he said; "but that was before the Press had a hundred eyes, and looking through the keyhole was a journalistic accomplishment. It wouldn't do now. The best thing you can do is to get the Italian Government to make a request quietly in the matter, and then I'll see what can be done."

Sandstone thanked the Home Secretary, and went to the

Italian Consulate. In three days from that it was stated that in consequence of facts which had come to the knowledge of the Home Secretary, the condemned Italian had been respited for inquiries to be made.

The Viscount had gained one point after being closeted with the Home Secretary for an hour. "Of course you are prepared to *prove* the man's innocence now?" the Minister had said at parting.

"Yes," answered Sandstone; "you shall have the real culprit's confession within a week."

The Home Secretary smiled. He saw that he was doing business with a clever man.

That evening Viscount Sandstone sent to Scotlandyard privately, and requested that two officers and a magistrate might proceed to a certain address in Back-hill to take the dying depositions of an Italian, one Pietro Manzoni, who had something to say concerning the recent murder.

It was in one of the vilest of the Back-hill dens that the dying man was found in the last mortal agony.

By his side sat his wife, gaunt-eyed, half-starved, and weeping.

"I am dying," said the Italian, "and I do not wish to die with a great crime unconfessed. It was I who stabbed Torini in the fight. Spaglietti is innocent. My wife will tell you why; I am too weak."

Here the dying man sank back on his rags, and the woman continued the story. She told how her husband had been badly treated by Torini, and had picked a quarrel with him; how the quarrel had become general, and knives been drawn; and how in the thick of the confusion he had stabbed Torini, and slipped away, dropping the bloody

knife where it was found, close to where Spaglietti stood when the bystanders seized him.

The dying man signed his confession, and the officers remained with him; but their task was not long. Just before midnight he held out his hand to his wife, spoke to her in his native tongue, and, turning his face to the wall, died.

Four-and-twenty hours afterwards Spaglietti was released by the Home Secretary. The confession of Manzoni, the authorities stated, had clearly established his innocence.

It was proposed to present the young Italian who had so cruelly suffered with a sum of money to start him in business, but after his release nothing was ever seen of him.

Viscount Sandstone was by no means sorry that Carlo Spaglietti had not come to thank him, as he would have been bound to go into the question of relationship, and hand him over the sum due to him under his father's will.

The young Italian doubtless had good and sufficient reasons for starting at once for the Continent, for the widow of the dying Italian who had confessed the murder went back to Italy at once, and took with her a good round sum in gold, which might perhaps have been traced by the inquisitive to Viscount Sandstone.

Manzoni's confession was worth paying for, as it had not only left a handsome pension for his widow, but had saved the brother-in-law of an English peer from the gallows.

The Italians of Back-hill and its vicinity always looked upon Viscount Sandstone as a gentleman who had saved one of their order from an unjust death.

Therefore, to show their gratitude, no organ-grinder thinks of passing through Eaton-square without obliging the Viscount to a tune gratis. But there is not one of them who guesses that the father of the fair Viscountess was once an organ-grinder himself, and that it was her brother who so narrowly escaped Jack Ketch.

No. XIV.

THE MAGIC PILL.

MRS. HARTOP was very ill—so ill that she could not move or lift her head, but could only lie still and groan. Under these circumstances, of course you would fancy that the invalid was in a comfortable bed, closely watched and tended by her friends, who were doing all that human power could to alleviate her sufferings.

Unfortunately for poor Mattie Hartop, she had no bed to lie on and no friends to tend her. She lay on a miserable pallet, her wasted limbs covered only by a dirty old patchwork quilt, the relic of other days.

The sick room was the top attic of a crazy old tenement in the Mint—one of those fever dens into which the poor are thrust by the action of the Artisans' Dwellings Act—an Act which, sweeping down the homes of the very poor by thousands, leaves them at the mercy of a few favoured rookery owners.

Mattie Hartop, the sick woman, had a husband and two children. The husband earned fifteen shillings a week, and spent the bulk of it in getting drunk.

The two children were away at the Board school during the day, for the law insisted that their heads should be filled though their stomachs went empty.

Bill, the boy, before the Board swooped down upon him, had earned a trifle at a timber-yard in Orange-street, but now that was stopped, and he and Nelly, the girl, had to go out day after day, and leave their mother to die alone.

Bill by-and-by got sick of going to school, so he played truant, and got his father taken up before the magistrate and fined.

For that his father promised to murder him, and, as Bill had previously had a taste of his father's violence, he thought discretion was the better part of valour, dodged his father's uplifted fist, and bolted. He didn't come back again, for, feeling hungry, he walked into a baker's shop, helped himself to a loaf, and laid up for a rainy day by seizing the contents of a temptingly open till at the same time.

As a reward for making this wise provision for his future maintenance. Justice decided at once to relieve him of all responsibility in the matter, and provided him with board and lodging gratis in a reformatory.

This left the Hartop family three in number only—the dying woman, the drunken father, and little Nelly.

Jack Hartop didn't trouble the domestic interior much. He only came home when the public-houses were shut, and then he was generally too drunk to do anything but swear at his wife, knock his daughter down, and go to sleep.

All through one long winter Mattie Hartop lay in agony, praying for the death that came with cruel slowness to end her miseries. One consolation only had she—one tie alone that reconciled her to life. Little seven-year-old Nelly was the angel of that awful home. She had a torn, ragged frock and a pinched white face, it is true, and no wings; but no robe of spotless white, no golden pinions, could have made the child more like a holy thing in her mother's weary eyes.

Nelly wasn't clever, or bright, or pretty; but the little gutter-bred thing had a whole world of love in her heart, and would have died to save her mother a pang.

Child as she was, and used to the brutal violence that reigned supreme in that awful alley, herding day and night with thieves and outcasts, she had learned the golden lessons of self-sacrifice. Her little hand would smooth the tangled hair from the dying woman's eyes. Her little feet would flit gently across the creaking, dirt-encrusted floor when mother slept. It was on her weak shoulder that the poor wretch's aching head would lie pillowed when the racking cough had left her faint and exhausted. But it. was only after school hours that Nelly could be the nurse. She dared not stay away, for that would get father into trouble, and father would beat her. She had heard her mother's agonised shriek once when the brutal ruffian had hit her in the mouth with his clenched fist, and the red blood had spirted forth, and she never wanted to hear it again. If father would only have hit her and beaten her out of doors, where mother could not see, she wouldn't have minded the pain and the horrible sickness. She could bear blows well, could Nelly, and never utter a cry, but she didn't want to be knocked about before her mother again.

In the bitterest part of the winter, when Mattie lay shivering under the thin coverlid, and coughing her heart out, Nelly heard of a chance of earning some money. A fine gentleman from one of the big theatres came to the Board school, and told the teacher he wanted fifty children for the pantomime. The teacher told Nelly she might be one of them, if her parents liked, and she went home and told her mother.

"I shall have to be out at night, mother, and you'll be all alone; but I shall earn money, mother—real bright silver money—and I can bring it home to you, and you can

buy something to eat with it, and the nice drink that Mrs. Maloney down stairs says you ought to have."

"I want nothing, Nelly," answered her mother, putting out her thin, wasted hand, and drawing the child to her; "but the money will buy you warmer clothes, and perhaps, Nelly, if you can give him a shilling or two, dad won't knock you about."

"Oh, I don't mind that, mother," answered the child. "It's only when he's drunk; but perhaps he would love me better if I earned something."

Mattie Hartop sighed. She was thinking of the different days when Nelly was born, and Jack was proud of her. That was before the cursed drink ruined him.

It was an old, old story that had come to the third volume in that filthy attic in the Mint. Jack Hartop had been a decent workman once. He was as nice a fellow as you'd meet with in a day's march when he courted Mattie, and they were a happy couple for the first year or two. Jack was a porter in a drapery house, and earned his thirty shillings a week then, and they had nice rooms. But by-and-by he got in with a man who had a turn for sport, and, being a nice companionable chap, Jack got chums with him, and took to going out of an evening with him instead of going home. Jack's friend took him to the sporting drums, and by-and-by Jack got a bit flash himself, and became learned on the points of bull-terriers and fighting men, and began to know the names of the horses who were in the big races.

Betting isn't a good game at any time; but it's about the worst game out for a man who has only thirty shillings a week to keep a wife and family on. From that time Jack began to go wrong. He couldn't go to the sporting publichouses without drinking, and drink costs money. Then he heard so many good things that he couldn't be fool enough not to risk half-a-crown now and then. There never is but one end to this sort of thing to men in Jack Hartop's position. He began to dislike his home and his wife's society; to long for the excitement of the public-house and the enlivening society of his "pals"; and so, gradually from being an honest, decent working man, he became a drinker and a loafer.

He lost one situation, and got another; lost that, and his character too—drifted from bad to worse, until he found himself at the docks earning what he could when he was sober, and oftener than not getting too drunk to do anything else.

Then it was that poor Mattie, worn out with trouble and despair, showed the first symptoms of the wasting disease that was slowly killing her. The sunlight had faded out of her life for ever. Her husband had become a violent and inveterate drunkard; her boy, cast on the streets, had been torn from her by the strong arm of the law; and, in her poverty and misery, Nelly only was true to her.

Of course, Jack had to be told of Nelly's brilliant offer. He happened to be sober at the time it was communicated to him, and he growled out a gruff assent.

He knew that the money Nelly earned would be so many more pints a week, and he would have sold his child into the vilest degradation for drink.

Nelly duly went to the theatre, and, when the pantomime commenced, took her place among the crowd of children who came on as imps and fairies.

Every evening, half starved, the little one, shivering in her scanty clothes, would go off to the great theatre, to appear presently as one of the goblin imps in the Cave of Despair, where the wicked magician worked his spells.

Nelly hadn't anything to say; but there was a little girl, not older than she was, at the theatre who had. Polly Smith lived over Southwark Bridge, and the children would call for each other, and go to the theatre together. But Polly Smith had a beautiful part. She wore a lovely dress, and was an attendant on the good Fairy who upset all the magician's spells. Polly had to hand the Fairy the magic pill which the Fairy presented to her godson the Prince.

They were very wonderful, these pills; whoever swallowed one had only to wish, and the wish was granted.

In the scene where Nelly was a goblin, the Prince swallows the first one, and wishes himself in the Realms of Light, where his fairy friend's kingdom is, and instantly the Cave of Despair vanishes, and all is golden day and flowers, and beautiful fairies.

Nelly and Polly often talked about that scene and those wonderful pills as they walked home after the theatre to the miserable dens where they lived. Polly wasn't so badly off as Nelly, for her father was in good work, and they always had something to eat every day, and he never knocked any of them about. One night Nelly told her little friend all about her poor mother—how ill she was, and how wretched, and how her father swore and beat her, and took all her money away that she earned, so that she couldn't buy her mother any of the nice things with it that she wanted to.

"Ah, poor mother!" said Nelly; "she's orful bad, and sometimes of a night, when I squeezes close to her, she ain't 'ardly got the strengf for to kiss me, and her lips is like ice on my forrud. I know she's dyin', and father says

it'll be a good job too; and when she's gone I sha'n't have not a fren' in the whole world."

"'Cept me," answered Polly.

"'Ceptin' ony you, Polly. I tell you wot I'll do, Polly, if mother dies," added the child, pausing and looking over the bridge to where the lamps flung their cold rays upon the black bosom of the Thames. "I tell you wot I'll do—I'll drownd myself."

"Oh, Nelly, you mustn't do that; it's wicked, and do you know wot's on the other side.?"

"No," answered the child, "I don't, and I don't much care. T'other side o' the water can't be much worse nor this 'ud be without mother."

The revelation of the extent of her little friend's trouble made a considerable impression on Polly, and all that night, after they had parted, she thought of nothing else.

The next evening she met Nelly with an air of great importance. "I've been thinking about what you told me yesterday, Nell—about your mother and father—and I want to help you. I say, if I could only get one of those magic pills that the Prince has!"

Nelly smiled. "'Tisn't real, Polly," she said; "I know that."

"Not real!" exclaimed Polly; "it is. I asked Miss Higginson, that plays the Fairy, if the pills do all that really, and she said of course they did. Have you never heard of pills that saved people's lives?"

"Yes; I have heard suthin' about that," said Nelly dubiously.

"Well, then, how do you know as these magic pills wouldn't do your mother good? I suppose it makes things seem different-like after you've taken 'em, but I know

they're real, because one night I went on without 'em. I had to go back, and the Fairy couldn't change the scene till the Prince had took one."

The children talked it over till Nelly seemed half persuaded that there was something in the magic pills, after all.

"But how am I to get one?" she asked.

"I'll do it," said Polly. "It's stealin', I'm afraid; and p'r'aps I shall be locked up; but I don't care if it'll do your mother good. When I take the box on to-morrow night, I'll take one out, and hide it, and when we get off I'll give it to you."

That night when Nelly got home she found her mother almost too weak to move. The poor woman held out her hand feebly to the child, and drew her down, and kissed her.

Then she felt that her mother's cheeks were wet with tears.

"I'm dying, Nelly," she said. "Some night you'll come home and find me gone. God protect you, Nelly!—be a good girl to father. P'r'aps he'll miss me, and turn kinder, like, after I'm gone."

"Mother," whispered Nelly, in a voice hoarse with grief and cold, "does pills ever do people any good when they're like you are?"

"They'd have to be magic pills to do me any good," answered Mrs. Hartop, smiling faintly.

Nelly never spoke another word; she flung herself down by the side of her mother, and raising the sufferer's head till it rested on her shoulder, she hushed her off to sleep as a mother lulls her child to rest.

* * * * *

It was midnight in the Mint. Outside in the filthy courts, barefooted ragged boys and girls still played and hooted. Up stairs and down stairs in the low lodginghouses there was the sound of fierce voices: now a man yelling aloud some vile oath; now a woman shrieking for mercy as the ruffian's fist came crashing into her face. No one stops aghast at the cry of "Murder!" in the Mint, and no one stops to interfere in a fight. Most of the people whose business or pleasure takes them through that network of infamy at night have fights of their own to attend No one wants to know his neighbours' business in the dilapidated houses let out in tenements in that savoury district. There were two-thirds of the population belonging to the criminal classes; and such a trifle as a shriek in the next room, or the sound of heavy blows raining down upon a body on the floor above, cannot be expected to cause much observation.

People rob and murder each other in the Mint as a matter of course, and even the fact of stumbling over a dead body as you climb the rickety stairs to your own attic does not cause you any surprise if you are an old inhabitant of the Mint. The houses are open night and day, and anyone who has a mind to can wander in and fight in the passages or die on the staircase. The Mint is Liberty Hall.*

^{*} I went through a Mint lodging-house some time since, the day after a woman had been found murdered in her "apartment." The occupants of the adjoining room were a man and woman and their four children. In reply to inquiries as to whether they had heard anything, they all answered that they had, but that they had not troubled about it. "If we was to get up every time we heard 'Murder!' called in this 'ere house," said the man, "it ain't much sleep as we should get, governor. It don't do for to interfere with your neighbours here."

Through the many crowds in the street, past drunken men and yelling women, Nelly threaded her way, hurrying along towards her home, and clasping in her hand that which was to save her dying mother.

Polly Smith had been true to her word, and, frightened and trembling, had brought one of the famous pills to Nelly.

After she had it in her possession, the minutes seemed hours. The children had all to go on again in a scene in the harlequinade, so that it was half-past eleven before she got the rags on, and twelve before she got into the Mint.

There was a great hulking fellow standing at the door of the house as Nelly dived into the entry, and he gave her a rough good-night.

"Good-night," said Nelly, and dodged past him, for the playful nature of a Mint gentleman often prompts him to try his fists on any passing object that may offer a fair target.

Up the creaking stairs went the child as fast as her tired little legs would carry her.

She pushed open the door of the attic, and entered.

By the faint light of a candle, burnt low in an old bottle that did duty for a candlestick, Nelly could see that there was a look upon her mother's face she had never seen before.

It seemed like a grey shadow passing over it. The child ran to the pallet, and, kneeling down, took her mother's hand.

"Mother!" she cried, "it's me—Nelly! Speak to me!" The woman's lips moved, but the words were inaudible.

"Mother," said Nelly; "see, I've brought you the magic pill you said would do you good."

She pushed the precious pill into her mother's cold hand. Suddenly the woman's closed eyes opened, and she looked at Nelly with a strange, vacant look. "The Realms of Light!" murmured the sufferer. "I can see the Realms of Light!"

Nelly's eyes filled with tears of joy. The magic pill was taking effect already. She had often told her mother of the Realms of Light in the pantomime.

The dying woman lay and babbled of the beautiful things that she could see. Her mind was wandering in the last dark hour.

Presently she rose a little in the bed, and pointed towards something that Nelly could not see. "Look!" she cried, "the happy children by the golden river. They are calling me! Let me go!"

The tired head sank back upon the pillow, and the eyes closed.

Nelly was delighted that her mother, only holding the magic pill in her hand, had seen such beautiful scenes. It was real, after all, she felt; and the girls who had told her it was all makebelieve about the Fairy and the Prince were wrong.

Suddenly she remembered that anyone swallowing the pill had their wish gratified, and she thought she would try it.

Gently she took the pellet from her mother's hand and swallowed it.

"I wish," she said, "that mother may be happy again, and never know any more grief or pain. Oh, please let me have my wish!"

At that moment a slight cough startled the child, and she looked up.

A man had stolen in at the door, and had waited there. One of the actors at the theatre had overheard the children talking about the magic pill and Nelly's mother, and had

followed the child, thinking he should like to see if the story of the family's miserable condition was true.

He had overheard Nelly's simple wish, and the patient's surroundings were too much for him. He was obliged to clear his throat.

"Don't be frightened, my poor child," he said, as Nelly, terrified lest she was to be taken to prison for stealing the magic pill, cowered down. "Don't be frightened; God has heard your wish. Your mother will never know grief or pain again. She is gone to the Realms of Light."

The man saw what the child had not noticed. Mattie Hartop lay back on her rags motionless, senseless—dead.

* * * * *

The story of the little child who had taken a magic pill home to cure her sick mother ran through the theatre, and the actor told the story well.

A subscription was raised, the poor mother was buried decently, and Nelly was taken away from her father, who was glad to be rid of the encumbrance, and was well cared for.

But it was years before she gave up the childish belief that if her mother had gone to the mysterious Realms of Light which lie beyond the earthly Caves of Despair, it was all owing to the magic pill.

No. XV.

A FALLEN IDOL.

"Now then, move on there, governor!"

The policeman spoke kindly enough to the dilapidated specimen of humanity who stood blocking the way of a duchess as she walked from her carriage along the crimson carpet into the great entrance-hall of a West-end mansion.

It was a gala night at the aforesaid mansion. Every window was gay with lights, and the strains of music floated on the night air—gay music that could find little echo in the hearts of some of the poor wretches who hung about outside, in the hope of earning a night's shelter, by fair means or foul.

"Now then, move on, governor, if you ain't a-going inside!"

This time the policeman took the dilapidated gentleman by the arm, and pushed him back.

The crowd laughed at the policeman's sally. It was a good joke to fancy such a tattered, out-at-elbow fellow going into that beautiful house.

The man thus addressed and thrust back started as if from a reverie.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly, "I didn't hear you." Then, buttoning his threadbare coat across his chest, and thrusting his hands deeply into the pockets of a dirty pair of light trousers worn into ribbons at the heels, he

pushed his way through the crowd, and went shivering along the street.

At the corner a coffee-stall keeper had just opened his establishment for the night. The dilapidated gentleman stood and looked at the tempting display of cups, and thick cake, and bread and butter.

"Cup o' coffee, sir?" said the man.

"I should like one, but I haven't any money."

"Ah, I see," answered the coffee merchant, with a laugh; "left your pus at home on the pianer."

The dilapidated gentleman thrust his hands deeper into his pockets, and moved on again.

"It's very hard," he muttered to himself; "very hard. What have I done to sink so low as this? God knows where I can lay my head this night!"

Muttering to himself, he went along aimlessly with that shuffling gait which comes of battered boots and weak limbs.

The coffee-stall keeper watched him till he'd turned the corner.

"Poor chap!" he said; "he looks reg'lar stone broke, but he spoke like a gent. What a lot o' these here brokendown swells there is about, to be sure!"

The man who had thus guessed at the position of the dilapidated one was right to a certain extent. Reuben Earle was a broken-down swell, and he was utterly penniless; but how great had been his terrible descent from wealth to poverty the coffee-stall keeper little surmised.

And yet he would have been quite aware of it had he known the name of the man whose retreating figure he was watching.

There had been a time, and that not so long ago, when

the name of Reuben Earle was famous through the length and breadth of the land. There had been a time when the greatest ones of Society were glad to shake his hand and to sit at his table, and when the smaller fry bowed down to him and worshipped him.

The name of Reuben Earle in those days had been synonymous with wealth, enterprise, and magnificence. He had been the greatest speculator of the day, a brilliant financial star—and the tongue of rumour was never still concerning his almost fabulous fortune.

His residence had been a palace, filled with the choicest works of art. Thither to bask in the sunshine of his smile came Fashion, Commerce, and Art. When on this very evening Reuben Earle, dilapidated, starving, and friendless, stood in a reverie in front of the magnificent mansion at the West where the ball of the season was taking place, his mind had been full of strange thoughts.

The policeman had ordered the outcast on, with a jest at which the crowd had roared. But it was a grim jest to Reuben Earle, for it was only a few years ago that this house called him master, and many among the crowd of notabilities now dancing to the merry strains he had heard had also been his guests.

The bystanders who laughed at the idea of the dilapidated one entering that splendid mansion failed to recognise in him the fallen star of the financial firmament.

He had first burst upon the world in the halcyon days of company-promoting—in that long period of feverish enterprise when the City was one huge gambling hell, and the madness of speculation had spread in ever widening circles until it left no portion of the community outside its baleful influence.

In those days vast fortunes were made and lost in a few months, and reckless extravagance ran riot through the land. In those days men flashed suddenly from obscurity into notoriety, and a name which one year would not have been accepted as security for five pounds was the next good enough, on a prospectus, to draw the hard-earned savings of a lifetime from thousands of pockets.

It was in those days that the name of Reuben Earle suddenly became one to conjure with. All that was known of his previous history, when he became famous, was that he had been an accountant, and had had a small office in Coleman-street.

Called in accidentally to assist in preparing a report of an insolvent trading concern which an adventurous promoter was anxious to palm off upon the public as a splendid investment for capital under the Limited Liability Act, Reuben Earle had his opportunity, and made the most of it.

His employer saw his worth. The financial genius which had hitherto been buried in tradesmen's books was developed on a grander scale, and in two years the exaccountant was chief of a palatial establishment in Lothbury, and the central figure in the brotherhood of bubble-mongers.

With increased confidence came increased opportunity, and genuine concerns were brought to him in such a number that in his legitimate successes his failures were lost sight of.

Several of the companies floated turned out paying concerns, the shares went to a premium, and Reuben Earle passed through the portals of the commercial half-world into the halls of dazzling, light where only the crême de la crême of money-makers are allowed to sit.

His position thus firmly established, his name quoted in the money articles as a guarantee of the genuineness of any new enterprise with which he associated himself, enormous sums were paid to him for his services in floating a new company. Foreign Governments sought his cooperation, great financiers were only too glad to associate themselves with him, Society opened its arms to him, and the public bowed down and worshipped the golden calf which they themselves had reared.

Then it was that the name of Reuben Earle was upon every lip; and the newspapers of Europe were full of on dits concerning his magnificence, his patronage of art and literature, and his princely charities. For four seasons he reigned supreme in the very house from the gate of which we have seen the policeman gruffly order him away.

Then gradually sinister rumours began to be circulated. An action with regard to a bankrupt company recalled a strange state of affairs. Reuben Earle had been the promoter, and in the evidence disclosures were made which set men's tongues wagging.

The fury of speculation was abating; the romance had worn off, and the reality had begun to peep through. Commercial immorality, which had been winked at when every man thought he was sharing in the plunder, began to be made a peg for sermons when the shareholders gradually awoke to the fact that they were the victims and not the victimisers.

The British public awoke from its indifference to the first principles of fair dealing, and suddenly assumed that mantle of virtuous indignation in which it is given to wrap itself by fits and starts. Confidence decreased; promoters, who had almost forgotten their share in certain disastrous speculations, were called upon to disgorge large sums of money; meetings of shareholders were called in all parts of the country, and without warning the situation became suddenly reversed. The hares turned on the hitherto successful hounds; the bubble of speculation burst with a loud report; and it became a wild scramble to see how much could be worried out of the men who, a few years back, had been lining their pockets in blissful unconsciousness of any legal liability.

No one was hurled with greater force from a fool's paradise into the bleak world outside its gates than Reuben Earle. As he had been the most conspicuous figure in the march to victory, so was he the most prominent in the disastrous retreat. Action after action brought by victims rendered daring by previous successes was decided against him, and at last, disgraced and ruined, with unheard-of liabilities suddenly thrust upon him, he capitulated unconditionally. The victorious enemy rushed in; Reuben Earle was declared a bankrupt; and the lawyers and accountants fought gallantly for his estate, while the creditors looked on with hungry eyes waiting to seize upon any crumbs which the professional gentlemen might allow to fall to their share.

Reuben Earle fled whither no one cared to ask. His name, worshipped in the full tide of his success, was execrated in his downfall. In his ruin he dragged down thousands of poor people, who had been tempted by large dividends to invest their capital in his schemes—schemes which had long been buoyed up only by the support of his name, and which, deprived of that, collapsed utterly. The highly-wrought accounts of the widespread misery caused by these burst bubbles inflamed the public mind against

their author, and within six months from the time Society had fought and plotted for admission to the great man's receptions and parties, his position had so changed that there was not one of his former guests who would have been seen talking with him in the street.

Reuben Earle felt bitterly the humiliation of his fall. He hid himself from the world, and led a chequered existence for some two years, and then he was forced from his hiding-place by the direst poverty.

He had saved but little from the wreck, and that little being exhausted, he was obliged to look about for the means of subsistence.

He tried one or two of his former friends, and took to hanging about their offices in the hope of getting employment from them. They refused to see him. Doubtless they fancied he had come to trade upon the former acquaintance, and to borrow money.

He met rebuff after rebuff, until his heart sank within him, and he allowed himself to drift—to drift so low that he was beyond reclaim. When a man's personal appearance suggests absolute penury, his last hope of employment is gone. He can only beg.

One consolation Reuben Earle had in the midst of all his misery. He was alone in the world. He had been engaged to the daughter of a wealthy merchant when the crash came. The match was abruptly broken off. Reuben Earle the great financier was a husband any man might call son-in-law; but Reuben Earle the broken-down bankrupt was the last man in the world to whom a careful father would entrust his daughter.

The ruined lover did not break his heart over the loss of handsome Gwendoline North. There was no love in the

affair. It would have been a diplomatic business, and nothing else—an alliance offensive and defensive between Wealth and Beauty.

But, as on this cold night, starving and homeless, he shuffled along the almost deserted streets, wondering where it was all to end, the memory of another woman's face came to him, and his thoughts carried him back into the past.

They carried him back to the time when he was poor and unknown, and had won a woman's loving heart only to betray it. He remembered how, struggling between passion and ambition, he had hesitated to resign Ethel Morton, and yet had not had the courage to marry and carry with him as his wife into the golden future that he meant to win a woman who lacked the polish of the great world in which he would have to mix.

As long as man's heart is wicked and woman's heart weak the story of the loves of Reuben Earle and Ethel Morton will be told again and again.

In the end wickedness triumphed over weakness. Reuben Earle, with many a specious promise, induced pretty Ethel to leave off the daily plodding life of a music-mistress and to be his wife—his wife in all but the name.

They were going to be married, of course. Ethel to the last never doubted that. Reuben was kind, affectionate, generous—everything but just, and Ethel lived on in a fool's paradise, enjoying the luxury her lover provided for her as the golden shower fell about him, and pleading now and again earnestly and tearfully that he would redeem his promise and rescue her from a position that in the long hours in which he now left her alone preyed upon her mind and utterly destroyed her happiness.

At last there came a time when Ethel pleaded not only for herself, but for another. When she saw the announcement of her lover's impending marriage, the tears that streamed from her beautiful eyes fell upon an innocent little face that she lifted up and pressed passionately to her lips.

That day she sought her betrayer out, and pleaded as she had never done before. "For the child's sake, Reuben!" she cried.

But Reuben Earle had hosts of friends about him now, and his name was beaten upon by the fierce light of publicity. He told Ethel it was impossible that he could make her his wife; his position would not allow him to. He would settle a handsome allowance upon her and the little one.

He pleaded his own case eloquently. He showed the weeping woman that it was necessary he should marry in his own sphere, and then he gently suggested that it was perhaps better now that the connection should cease. He wished to start as a married man with a clear conscience.

Ethel Morton refused his offer with scorn, and turned upon her false lover so fiercely that, with an angry oath, he bade her be silent, and turned upon his heel to leave her.

She stepped before him, and barred the way.

"Not till you have heard me out, Reuben Earle!" she cried. "You are rich and powerful now, and you have hundreds of friends. Marry this lady, and cast me off if you will. I will have none of your gold. But mark my words, the day will come when you would give the world to have someone near you who would love you as faithfully as I have done."

Ethel Morton kept her word. She refused her lover's

offer, and, taking her baby with her, left his luxurious home, and went out in the world to earn her own living and to keep her child.

No wonder to-night, in his utter wretchedness and loneliness, the dilapidated, penniless, starving wretch thought of his vanished greatness, and remembered Ethel Morton's prophetic words.

* * * * *

A concert at the Hanover-square Rooms was just over; the crowd had cleared away, and only three carriages and a few cabs were still waiting.

The men who hang about on the chance of earning a few coppers at the "Keb or kerridge, sir," business had dispersed, for they knew that there were only the singers and musicians to come.

Among the idlers standing near the door was Reuben Earle. Another night and another day had passed over his head, and he was twenty-four hours nearer absolute starvation. Still he was unable to make up his mind to try the casual ward. The pangs of hunger were on him, but he was struggling with them. Surely, surely, he would not be allowed to die in the streets. Providence would throw some straw for him to clutch at yet. That was the hope that buoyed him up still. He had been hanging about outside the Rooms to-night fancying that perhaps he too might earn a copper by calling a carriage; but he had been elbowed out of the way by the roughs, who looked upon him as an interloper.

While he was lingering near the door still, a lady with a roll of music under her arm came out.

"That's Madame Ethel, the new pianist," said a by-stander; "she's made a great success to-night."

Something in the name caused Reuben Earle to glance eagerly in the lady's face. Before he could recover from the shock which the sudden recognition caused him the lady spoke to him.

"Fetch me a cab, my good fellow," she said pleasantly.

Reuben Earle, hardly knowing what he did, hailed the first cab he saw, and held the door open. The lady stepped in, and dropped a shilling into his hand.

"God bless you, Ethel!" he exclaimed, and then the pent-up misery broke out, and the shivering, white-faced outcast burst into tears.

At the first accents of his voice the lady looked up, and before the crowd could recover from its surprise at the weeping carriage-caller it was still further astonished to see the dilapidated fellow gently dragged into the cab, while the lady said to the cabman, in a voice husky with emotion, "Blandford-street!"

Ethel Morton, now a fashionable pianist, had recognised Reuben Earle, her betrayer, and had stretched out a hand to help him when all men had turned from him.

* * * * *

Ethel Morton heaped coals of fire upon the head of the man who had, in the days of his prosperity, cast away the substance of his love to grasp the shadow of a grand alliance-

All that money could do she did for him now. Tenderly she nursed him back to health, and the money her talents brought her was never so blessed in her eyes as now that it could be spent in his service.

Six months after that strange meeting a lady, a gentleman, and a little girl sat in the garden of a sweet country villa as the twilight slowly dimmed the splendour of the summer roses.

- "And you are really my papa—that mamma has so often talked to me about?" said the child, looking up in the gentleman's face.
- "Yes, darling," answers the gentleman, pressing the hand of the lady, lying gently in his.
 - "And you will never go away again?"
- "Never again, dear!" says the lady; and then she kisses the little girl, and bids her run into the house, for the night is getting damp.

Mrs. Earle does not wish little Ethel to see that the tears are trickling down her father's cheeks. Yet they are tears that no man need be ashamed of. Reuben Earle is thinking of the holy deed of the woman he betrayed in the days of his splendour, who, finding him friendless, penniless, and starving, forgave him the bitter wrong, and placed her fortune and her future at his mercy by allying herself with him in the eyes of God and man.

Rich, he had despised her; poor, she took him and set up again in her loving heart the image which the multitude he had befriended had long ago cast down and trampled in the dust.

No. XVI.

THE TENANTS OF MYRTLE LODGE.

IT was a nice little detached villa—a pretty rustic sort of a place, such as enterprising builders plant in suburban highways and advertise as "charming villa residences, convenient to town and close to railway-station." Lodge was on the Highgate-road; it had a charming little front garden, with a wicket-gate, and there was a highly rural suggestion in the climbing rose artistically trained over the porch. Often when Jack Holness passed Myrtle Lodge, on his way to the station to catch the City train, he would pull his pipe out of his mouth, and exclaim, "By Jove, that is a pretty place!" Jack was quite smitten with Myrtle Lodge, and he began to take an interest in everything connected with it. He was in the office of the auctioneer who had the letting of it and of a large quantity of property at Highgate, and that's how he came to be living in the neighbourhood. His employer had a nice house to let, furnished, and the old lady in charge of it had grown nervous in consequence of repeated burglaries in the vicinity. Mr. Dalton, the auctioneer, had sympathised with the old lady's feelings, and had promised a man should sleep in the house every night till it was let. Jack had heard of the circumstance, and had offered, if Mr. Dalton liked, to take up his quarters there till the house was let, and his offer had been accepted.

He was an artful fellow, this Jack Holness. His sweet-

heart, pretty May Griffiths, lived at Highgate; and as Jack's father and mother lived at Peckham, the young lovers had some difficulty in arranging for those evening promenades so dear to the hearts of engaged couples.

You may be sure the beautiful walks at Highgate had no more constant patrons than Jack and May when the young man came to live at Holmwood House. The only drawback to their happiness was the constant fear that this desirable residence would be let, and then Jack would have to go back to Peckham. Whichever way the lovers walked in the long, fine evenings, they generally managed to pass Myrtle Lodge before they separated, and they always had a good long look at the roses, and the garden, and the pretty little house.

"When we're married, May," Jack would say, "that's just where I should like to live."

"Oh, wouldn't it be nice!" May would answer, clapping her pretty little hands. "What a garden you could make of it, couldn't you, dear?"

"Rather!" Jack would reply, for he was very proud of his gardening. He'd even made a geranium grow in the little back yard at Peckham, and his window-boxes were the admiration of the neighbourhood.

From taking an interest in the house, Jack began to take an interest in the tenant. He was a white-haired old gentleman who wore spectacles and lived all alone. A woman came in every day and "did" for him, but she always went home at night. Sometimes the old gentleman was at Myrtle Lodge for a whole week, and then they wouldn't see him for a fortnight, and the place would have a "shut up" appearance.

Jack referred to the books of his firm to find out who the

old gentleman was. He turned out to be a Mr. Richards, and was described as a commercial traveller in the jewel trade. That, of course, accounted for his being away so often.

By-and-by Holmwood House was let, and Jack had to go back to Peckham, and see a good deal less of his sweetheart. But the time was fast approaching when they would be divided no longer. The young couple had made up their minds to make the fatal plunge into the ocean of matrimony and defy the billows.

It was all fixed and settled; the day was named; May's parents, who were respectable tradespeople, had come down handsomely; and the only thing that was worrying Jack was where they were to pitch their tent.

May wanted to live at Highgate, and Jack was quite agreeable, but they couldn't see anything that would suit them—except, of course, Myrtle Lodge, and that was let.

The white-haired old gentleman still lived in it alone, and made no sign of moving.

"I should have liked that place, May," said Jack, one Saturday afternoon, as they stood and looked over the palings. "We always had a fancy for it, and, somehow or other, I think we should be lucky there."

"It's no good thinking about it," answered May.

"It's only thirty pounds a year, too," said Jack. "It's the cheapest place in the neighbourhood. I'm not spiteful, but I wish something would happen to old Richards."

"Oh, Jack, how wicked!"

"I don't mean anything dreadful, May. I mean I wish he'd go abroad for his health, or get it into his head that he'd be more comfortable in lodgings."

Jack thought of his words a month afterwards, for some-

thing had happened to old Mr. Richards. He had gone out the very day that Jack was talking about him, and nothing had been heard of him since. There would have been nothing startling in his long absence, seeing that he was a commercial traveller, but for the fact that he had distinctly told the woman who "did" for him he should be back in two days; and he had also omitted to send the rent on quarter-day, which fell a week after his disappearance. During the whole of his tenancy he had never missed paying to the day.

Mr. Dalton, after six weeks had gone by, himself grew uneasy. He couldn't leave the house shut up altogether, and the woman wouldn't go until she knew to whom to look for payment. Everybody was convinced that something had happened to the tenant of Myrtle Lodge, but the question was—what? At last Mr. Dalton decided to go over the house. He found it nicely furnished, and everything in order. "You see," he said to Jack, who accompanied him, "these things are security for our rent, and more than that. Now it's all about that Mr. Richards has disappeared, and the house is tenantless, I'm fidgety. Somebody may come in and clear everything away. I wish you wouldn't mind living here for a bit, while we wait a reasonable time to see if the old gentleman turns up."

So it happened, in quite an unexpected way, that Jack and May did start married life in Myrtle Lodge after all, for when the wedding day came round old Richards was still absent.

This happened in the winter, and when the spring days dawned Jack and May were still in undisturbed possession.

They had, with the landlord's permission, packed all Mr. Richards's goods together in one room, and put in their

own; and at last the landlord decided to remove the goods of his late tenant, and keep them as security for the rent, and relet the house to Jack.

He had no scruple in doing this, as Richards's tenancy expired the quarter-day following his mysterious disappearance.

The day that they were the actual tenants of Myrtle Lodge, Mr. and Mrs. Holness gave a little party, invited mamma and papa from Peckham, and mamma and papa from Highgate, and had a sort of deferred house-warming. No one could come and turn them out now.

People about Highgate talked a good deal concerning old Mr. Richards, and it was popularly surmised that he had been made away with.

At the time of his disappearance there had been an epidemic of crime. It was only the previous week that one of a series of gigantic jewel robberies had been committed in London, and that very week a notorious burglar who had long evaded the police had been captured, just as he was leaving an earl's country seat with a bag full of valuable plate.

This fellow was one Ralph Smith, who for years had baffled the authorities, though they were certain that, sometimes single-handed, and sometimes with a gang, he had been mixed up in nearly all the biggest and most skilfully-planned burglaries of the last five years.

The night of his capture he had made a desperate defence, and he was escaping from the policeman and getting clear away, when a frightened man-servant came out with a gun, and, letting it off at random, was surprised to see the burglar drop.

The wounded man was carried to the police-station, and

surgically attended; but the wound proved fatal. The bullet had entered a dangerous part, and three days afterwards the fellow, who had been recognised as Ralph Smith by a London detective, breathed his last.

Although conscious the whole time, he maintained a dogged silence, and, though repeatedly questioned, refused to divulge the names of any of his accomplices or the places where "the swag" which he was known to have cleared lately was concealed.

At this time the papers were full of these midnight attacks on life and property, and it was conjectured that Richards, who had been traveller to a firm of jewellers, had been murdered and robbed of his stock.

Jack and May soon began to feel quite at home in Myrtle Lodge, and gradually ceased to trouble about the fate of its former occupant.

They would as soon have expected a ghost to walk in as to see the gold spectacles and white hair of Mr. Richards.

And yet those were the very things they did see.

May saw them first, and gave a shriek. She was turning out a lumber-room, where they had piled the odds and ends soon after they came into the house, and a bandbox tumbled down and the lid rolled off.

And there, inside that bandbox, May's horrified eyes beheld a lot of flowing white hair and a pair of gold spectacles.

It was in the evening, and Jack was at home and smoking his pipe down stairs.

Hearing May shriek, he was up the stairs in a twinkling.

"What is it?" he cried.

"Oh, Jack!" exclaimed May, trembling. "I won't stay in the house another minute. Look!"

Jack looked in the direction of May's finger, and started.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Old Richards's hair and spectacles!"

Jack went to move the box.

"Don't touch it!" shrieked May. "His body can't be far off. Oh, Jack, Jack, we've been living in the house all this time with a murdered body!"

Tack reassured his wife.

"Nonsense, my dear! there's no dead body here. Our noses would have found it out long ago if there had been."

Then he gently lifted the white hair up, half expecting himself to see it dabbled with gore.

He looked at it for a moment curiously, and then burst out laughing.

"Why, it's a wig!" he said. "The old boy's left it at home, that's all. Perhaps he always put his Sunday one on when he went out."

May was by no means reassured. She insisted upon the door of the lumber-room being instantly locked and the key taken away, and she never passed the room without a shudder, even in the broad daylight.

As the disappearance of the old man had created some excitement, Jack thought it best to take the wig and spectacles to the police-station. The inspector looked at them, and was quite of Jack's opinion that there was nothing in it.

Probably the old gentleman had put the wig away for a new one, and had forgotten his spectacles.

There the matter rested.

* * * * *

It was a year after the mysterious disappearance of the tenant of Myrtle Lodge.

Nothing had been heard of him; no one had come forward to claim his property, and all inquiries had been unavailing to find out who were his employers or his friends.

Jack Holness and May were a year older and a year wiser than they were when, full of hope and self-confidence, they launched out into housekeeping, and accepted the burden of rent, rates, and taxes. With the year had come a young gentleman, whose name also was Holness, to make the family party three instead of two; and, most unfortunately, just at the time when the shoe began to pinch, Jack's employer retired from business, and Jack was out of a berth.

His salary had been a good one, and it was a great loss to him. Such situations are not picked up in a week, and the young husband and father looked forward to a month or six weeks' enforced idleness with a long face.

Myrtle Lodge, for the first time, lost its romantic aspect, for those little white and blue papers which are constantly being left at your door are calculated to rub the gilt off the gingerbread pretty considerably. "Queen's Taxes—Last Application!" "Water Rate—Notice of Termination of Supply!" "Highway Rate!" "Poor Rate!"—Oh, when you have a nice little pile of such literature staring at you from the side of the chimney-glass, where your careful wife has placed them lest you should overlook them, doesn't that "house-all-to-yourself" dream begin to wear a night-mare aspect?

What with the loss of his berth, the birth of the baby, and the accumulation of rates and taxes, and other liabilities, poor Jack began to feel supremely uncomfortable; but May never lost her spirits.

She was as bright and cheerful as ever. She was certain something would turn up. "I always said Myrtle Lodge would be lucky to us, Jack, and it will. There! now be a good boy; smile and kiss me directly, sir."

What could Jack do but obey? The kiss was hearty enough, but the smile was a very weak affair. Jack had lost faith in Myrtle Lodge altogether.

He had plenty of leisure now, and when he was not looking about for a berth he was digging in the garden, or perusing the papers. Reading the Daily Telegraph out aloud to May one evening, he read her a case in which a burglar had been captured whilst endeavouring to break into Lady Dashfield's residence. The report mentioned that Lady Dashfield seemed to be much favoured by the burglar fraternity, as it was only about eighteen months since that her house had been entered and the best of her ladyship's jewels carried off. Of the said jewels, the article went on, "no trace has ever been found, although there is a standing reward of £1,000 for any information which will lead to their recovery."

"A thousand pounds!" exclaimed May. "Oh, Jack, why can't we find them? Fancy getting a thousand pounds!"

"It is fancy," answered Jack. "Where shall we look for the jewels—up the chimney?"

May laughed, and Jack went on reading, and picked out a nice exciting murder down in the country to amuse his wife with while she rocked the baby to sleep.

When Jack wasn't reading, he amused himself, as I have said, in the garden. The back garden had been neglected

in the old gentleman's time. It wanted redigging. Jack determined to make a nice flower bed in the centre, where at present stood an old tree, which was neither useful nor ornamental. He cut the tree down, and began digging up the ground all round.

It was one fine spring afternoon that he commenced. He wanted some hard work to relieve his mind, for things were getting very uncomfortable indeed, and the chance of obtaining a situation seemed farther off than ever.

"If I had the capital," thought Jack, "I'd start on my own account. There's plenty of room for a house agent down here. But what's the use of thinking about it?" he exclaimed; "where should I get the money from?"

He sent the pickaxe violently into the ground he was digging up, and there was a sharp, clear ring on the air.

"What the dickens was that?" said Jack. "It sounded like metal."

Again he dashed the axe into the ground, again the result was a hard metallic ring.

"By Jove, there's something buried here!" he exclaimed.

All the marvellous stories of treasure trove that he had read came crowding on his brain, as with might and main he flung the loosened earth aside, and cleared a space round the solid substance his axe had struck.

What was he about to find?

At last he had the object in view. It was encrusted with clay and dirt, and had evidently been buried some time.

He picked it out from its bed of soil, and examined it carefully. It was a tin box—something like a large cash-box.

Jack ran with it into the house, and called May to look.

- "See what I've found in the garden!"
- "Oh, Jack, whatever is it?"
- "Goodness knows! I'm going to see."

But it wasn't so easy. The box was locked.

Not to be baffled, Jack got a hammer and a chisel, and broke it open, and then looked eagerly at what was inside.

"They are jewel-cases!" exclaimed May. "Oh!"

No wonder May said "Oh!" and started. She had opened one of the cases, and the contents had dazzled her.

- "Diamonds!" cried Jack.
- "Oh, what beauties!" exclaimed May. "I never saw such diamonds in my life!"

Ali Baba was not more astonished at what he saw in the robbers' cave than were Jack and May as they examined the marvellous contents of that box. There were a diamond necklace, diamond earrings, pearl necklaces, emeralds, rubies—quite a collection of magnificent jewels.

"Whatever shall we do with them?" said Jack. "Hullo! here's a monogram."

May looked eagerly at the locket which Jack held up—"G. E. D."

Yes; there it was, plain enough.

That monogram had a marvellous effect on Jack. He put on his hat, bade May lock up the jewels, and rushed of to town.

In an hour and a half he was back. His face was crimson with excitement.

May came running to the door.

"It's right, May!" he exclaimed, catching her in his arms, and hugging all the set out of her pretty cuffs and collar. "I've been to Scotland-yard, and seen'the descrip-

tion of the lost jewels. I remembered that 'G. E. D.' directly. They're the Dashfield jewels!"

"Oh, Jack!"

That was all May could say. Her breath was gone. The idea that Jack had dug up a thousand pounds reward in the back garden of Myrtle Lodge had fairly taken it away.

But it was a fact, nevertheless.

Jack went again to Scotland-yard the next day, narrated all the circumstances, and then went to Lord Dashfield's house, and saw his lordship.

The story was in all the papers, and the police came down. Then the local police recalled about the wig and spectacles Jack had brought them. A clue was started, and by-and-by the mysterious disappearance of old Mr. Richards was accounted for.

There was now no doubt that he was Ralph Smith, the notorious burglar, and that he had used Myrtle Lodge simply as a central depot from whence to carry on his depredations, and as a safe place in which to conceal his booty until he could dispose of it quietly.

No one who had seen the white-haired old gentleman at work among his roses ever suspected that under the white hair and behind the gold glasses a midnight marauder concealed an identity which Scotland-yard would have given a good deal to discover.

* * * * *

"John Holness, House and Estate Agent."

That is what the passer-by reads on a brass plate outside the door of a businesslike-looking office in Highgate.

Jack had started on his own account, and is doing well. By-and-by he intends, as his business develops, to have a City office as well. He has got a capital connection, and all the best places near the Northern heights are on his books.

The garden of Myrtle Lodge is a picture. Never so pretty a picture, though, in spite of its roses, as when May and Jack and the little one play among the flowers in the bright summer evenings.

"Ah, Jack, dear," May will say sometimes, "I told you Myrtle Lodge would be lucky to us."

And Jack, being unable to contradict his pretty little better half, says nothing. He looks round to see that nobody is admiring his roses over the garden-gate, and having satisfied himself that the performance will be strictly private, he gives May a kiss that might be heard right down at the Archway.

No. XVII.

AN INFERNAL MACHINE.

It was an ordinary house, standing in one of the broad streets that run out of the Kentish Town-road, and are stopped at the other end by fields as yet unbuilt over but plentifully strewn with notice-boards, informing the nurses and children who come there in the summer days to play that "this desirable land is to be let for building purposes."

The house was the last one in the row; outside the garden wall was a piece of waste land strewn with old kettles, stray bricks, and dead cats, and this piece of waste land, trampled into a quagmire by the feet of the last batch of workmen who had conducted building operations in the neighbourhood, gradually merged into a green field, with two real trees and a broken-down fence.

The inhabitants of "the last house in the row," as it was generally called, were objects of considerable interest to the neighbours. No one quite knew when they came, for the house had been to let a long time, and the new-comers seemed to have been spirited into it all of a sudden.

No furniture van stopped up the road for half a day; no straw-strewn pavement spoke eloquently of a move; and even the usually astute local tradespeople who leave their cards almost before a new tenant has got into the hall, had let the Doubrowskis alone.

Mrs. Brown, who lived opposite, and had the best view of

the Doubrowski interior, had soon made up her mind that they were something queer; and Mr. Brown, who was a commercial traveller, and accustomed to judge a good deal by outward appearances, quite coincided with his better half.

The family consisted of an old gentleman with flowing white hair and a long grey beard. His face was thin and pale, and under his shaggy grey eyebrows there were a pair of keen, sharp eyes that seemed perpetually on the watch for somebody who didn't come. Besides the old gentleman, there was a beautiful young girl, who was evidently the old gentleman's daughter. At least, so Mrs. Brown concluded, and, as it happened, she was quite correct in her surmise.

Paul Doubrowski was a Pole, and the beautiful girl was his daughter Feodora. They spoke English with the fluency which Poles so easily acquire. That Mrs. Brown found out from the butcher and the milkman.

Old Paul Doubrowski and his daughter had not been her opposite neighbours many months before Mrs. Brown made a further discovery. Late at night, after the gas-lamps were lighted, and darkness had settled down upon the surrounding fields, strange, fierce, foreign-looking men would come to the last house in the row, and stay sometimes till far into the morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown put their heads together again, and this time they decided that old Doubrowski was a conspirator, and that the strange-looking men were his accomplices in one of those dreadful plots which foreigners delight in. Whether Mr. and Mrs. Brown were right again, we shall find out perhaps when we ourselves know a little more of the life-story of these very interesting people.

Let us avail ourselves of our Asmodean privilege, and lift

the roof off the last house in the row in that quiet terrace in Kentish Town.

It is nearly midnight. All around us are homely English people. There is a retired publican next door, commercial traveller Brown opposite, a ladies' school a few doors off, where at the present moment twenty innocent heads in curl-papers are pressing the pillow, dreaming of French verbs, boy sweethearts, and new hats. It is not here one would expect to find reminiscences of fierce life-combats, of wild adventure, or to trace the course of a vendetta fiercer in its relentless venom than any of those which, if history and story-books are to be believed, were wont to soak the soil of Corsica with civilian blood.

Yet here, in this humdrum centre of English suburban life, a weird life-drama is being worked out—a mighty romance, transplanted from the far-off snows of Russian Poland, is gradually approaching its awful climax.

Outside the jerry-built, ugly, suburban house all is vulgarly commonplace; from the leaden skies falls a dully dispiriting rain, which is soaking the heaps of old rubbish in the quagmire field; a stupid-faced policeman, dreaming of nothing worse than a drunken woman at the street corner or a boy thief on the prowl, tries the front gate mechanically as he passes, and curses the weather, which is bad for his "rheumatiz." Behind the drawn blinds stolid English men and women snore out the hours of rest in their dull, uneventful lives; the spoons and forks under the bed, and the alarum clock set ready to wake the master at seventhirty, and the food-warmer on the hob in case baby should wake in the night and refuse otherwise to be comforted. In some of the attics above there is still a gleam of light. The tired slavey has come up from the beetles and the soot of

an English kitchen to snatch a few hours' rest, and here there is perhaps a gleam of romance. By the flickering light of the cheap candle, guttering down into the greasy grimed candlestick, Mary Jane is flying into fairyland. A duke, with blue eyes and a yellow moustache, is her hero for a few short minutes, and she is whirling round the grand ball-room of De Montmorency Castle clasped in his arms. Mary Jane has learnt to read, and over her favourite journal forgets for a while that the chimney sweep is coming at five, and that there is six shillings to come out of her month's wages for that decanter she smashed this afternoon.

Sluggishly the stream of ordinary English life creeps on in this quiet terrace, and all is dull, flat, and uneventful whenever we lift the roof to pry. Yet here, within this very circle of insipid existence, we can find a wild and fierce pulsation of life if we know where to look for it.

Let us see how the Doubrowskis are spending the night in the last house in the row.

"Feodora, does thy heart fail thee?"

The young girl is sitting on a stool at the old man's feet, her head resting on his knee.

As he speaks she looks up and hastily brushes the threatening tear from her light-blue eyes.

"Oh, father—it is so very, very dreadful," she says. "Is there no way but this?"

Paul Doubrowski lays his trembling hand lovingly on his daughter's wealth of flaxen hair.

"Listen, my child! Now that the hour of vengeance approaches, remember our bitter wrongs. Have I not told you the story often enough?"

"Yes, father," murmurs the girl, drooping her head again.

"Must I again conjure up that terrible scene? Ah, Wladislas, my son, my son!" cries the old man, stretching out his hands. "I see you now in all the pride and vigour of your youth. Again I kneel by your poor mangled body, and breathe a vow to Heaven to be avenged upon your murderer!"

Feodora listens and shudders.

"And you, Feodora; can you not see now, as I see it, the pale face of your brother as he lay dead? Did I not take you, child as you were, and show the cruel wounds where the Russian's bloody sword had hacked and hewn him?"

"I was so young, father, then. I have forgotten it almost."

"Forgotten it!"

Paul Doubrowski seizes the trembling girl by the wrist.

"Listen, then! you must forget nothing. Years have gone by since the great rising, but to me it is as yesterday. Before the insurrection of '63 we were great and wealthy—we Doubrowskis—and we lived at peace with the Tsar and with our own people. When Mieroslavski raised his standard we held aloof. Happy with my wife and my dear children, I had no wish to peril their lives in this rash enterprise against a mighty Power. Some of our villagers, being under a sense of wrong inflicted on them by the oppressor, joined the ranks of the revolutionists, and for that we all had to pay. When the victorious Russian troops crushed the last spark of rebellion down, we were handed over to fire and sword. Our wives and children were massacred before our eyes, and hundreds of innocent beings were transported without trial to endure the horrors

of Siberia. I had remained loyal, but my loyalty availed me nothing. I was wealthy, and the Russians coveted my wealth; my estate was confiscated, and we were driven out by the Russian colonel who held our village. Your mother was a beautiful woman, and the vile Muscovite ordered her to be seized. She read her fate in his eyes, and cried aloud for me to kill her. Wladislas, my son, a youth, a mere boy of sixteen, maddened at the treatment of his mother, broke through the soldiery, and flung his arms about her neck. He was unarmed—a boy, I tell you, and yet the Russian colonel, Janovitch—remember the name, girl!—drew his sword and struck him dead."

"Father, enough!" cried Feodora, burying her face in her hands as though to shut out the sight.

But Paul Doubrowski still continued, his old voice rising in his excitement to a shrill childish treble—

"The life-blood of her boy welled out, and bathed the poor mother's bosom. Even the fierce soldiery were touched by her despairing cry as she clasped the lifeless body to her breast.

"Janovitch, perhaps fearing that he had gone too far, withdrew with his men, bidding us roughly all begone before sunset.

"Then, kneeling by the body of Wladislas, I swore an oath of vengeance that I would do unto the murderer as he had done to me, though I waited twenty years for my vengeance. You were but a baby-girl then, but I bade you touch your brother's cold brow with your lips, and repeat the oath after me.

"Your mother smiled as she heard those words, and that was her last smile on earth. She never recovered the shock of her boy's death, and in the first month of our exile breathed her last in my arms, leaving me alone with you, Feodora, and my revenge.

"Seventeen years have passed since then, and I have never swerved from my purpose. I have waited till God should deliver the enemy into our hands, ready at any moment to strike the blow.

"To-day the Almighty has chosen you as the instrument of justice against your brother's murderer. Feodora, say you do not shrink from the holiest task ever confided to a woman's weak arm!"

The young girl lifts her face again, and it is wet with tears.

"No, father," she cried; "I will hesitate no longer!"

"Your part of the task is nothing, my child," says the old man, gently. "You have but to bring Nicolai Janovitch here to-morrow, and leave the rest to me. Will he come?"

"Yes, he will come," answers the girl; "and now good night, dear father, and God bless you!"

Feodora Doubrowski kisses her father, and goes to her room with a heavy heart. She knows that Nicolai Janovitch, the handsome young Russian, is doomed if he crosses the threshold of her home. Nicolai is the son—the only son—of old Colonel Janovitch, and his father's idol. He is over here learning English in London. Doubrowski has bided his time well. When young Janovitch came to England Doubrowski came too. Then he knew that he should have his victim safe. But he had patience that was sublime. A dozen times he might have slain the young man in the street, but he had a deeper purpose to fulfil. He would kill him before his father's eyes, as Wladislas had been slain.

When the old colonel also came to London to visit his son, twenty Polish exiles brought the news to Doubrowski. These men cling together in their misfortune, and the vengeance of one is the vengeance of all.

It was a daring scheme the old Polish nobleman had nursed in his heart so long. But it had been well matured. To carry it out, the connivance of his daughter had been necessary. She had been a willing tool at first, for the story of her brother's murder had been the gospel of her childhood and her youth.

Her youth and beauty had been the means now to entrap young Janovitch. She had been flung in his way on every possible occasion, until the young man had become romantically interested in the beautiful girl who seemed so mysteriously to cross his path.

He rarely rode in the park without seeing Feodora sitting quietly on one of the seats reading. If he attended the Russian Chapel, generally among the worshippers he would notice the same sweet face.

The meetings would have been difficult to arrange but for the completeness with which old Doubrowski's plans were laid. Long years of rehearsal had brought about perfection. When the young Russian first came to London he wanted an English servant. He obtained one with high recommendations, and that English servant was a spy in the employment of a desperate band of Continental conspirators, of which Doubrowski was a member.

One day, walking in the park, the young Russian sat down, and found himself side by side with Feodora. She dropped her parasol; he picked it up, and she thanked him in English. Then he addressed her in Russian. "Was she not a countrywoman of his? Had he not seen

her at the Russian Chapel?" Feodora answered him gracefully and innocently in his native tongue. "Yes, she was a Russian; but she came to England a mere child."

One accidental meeting led to another. Always by the merest of chances the young people met in the park, and the man found himself drifting into a state of feeling with regard to the beautiful Russian girl which he found it difficult to explain even to himself.

He was falling in love with her. She was evidently a lady, and he didn't feel quite comfortable. He was a brave, good-hearted young fellow, and had no idea of harm; but he felt that to fall in love with a young lady one meets in the park was hardly a prudent thing to do.

Feodora played her part well at first. She was simply obeying her father's instructions, and luring the son of her brother's murderer to his doom. She had a vague idea of what that doom would be. But gradually a new feeling took possession of her heart. She began to look forward to her meetings with the handsome young Russian, and to forget, when talking with him, the terrible shadow which stood at the end of the perilous path she was treading.

It was on the night that her father suddenly revealed to her that the scheme of his vengeance was ripe for execution, that Feodora made a terrible discovery.

She had fallen in love with the man whom she was luring to destruction.

She could hide the terrible secret from herself no longer. That night she lay in agony of mind, and never closed her eyes. What was she to do? Her father's instructions were simple. She had promised to meet Nicolai on the morrow, and introduce him to her father. She had played her part, and recited the story she had been taught.

Her father, she told Nicolai, was an aged Russian gentleman, who had been tutor in a nobleman's family. He was now in poor circumstances, and too old to come out. If the young gentleman would see her father and examine his testimonials, she was sure he would be able to speak a good word for him at the Embassy, and get him some translating or some literary work to do.

In vain she conjured up the hideous vision of her murdered brother, of her mother's death, and thought of her father's life-long sorrow, and the bitter wrong that robbed him and flung him a wandering outcast on the world. She could not bring herself to execute the vengeance that was approaching; she could only think of the handsome, gentle young Russian who had won his way into her girlish heart. Whom was she to betray—her lover or her father?

She had pleaded with her father, as we have seen, but his answer had silenced the pleas that were trembling on her tongue. On the morrow she must fulfil the vow her baby-lips had repeated by her brother's corpse. To-morrow she must bring this young man, alone and unprotected, to her father's house, and then—she dared not think of the rest.

* * * * *

It was evening in the little house in Kentish Town.

Old Doubrowski, his keen eyes unnaturally brilliant, and his old limbs trembling with excitement, stood watching from the window for his prey.

Suddenly the expression of his face altered from expectation to dismay. A foreign-looking man was coming hastily up the road towards his house.

What did it mean?

In a moment he was at the front door, and the foreigner was inside.

"She has betrayed us!" cried the man.

"Betrayed us! my own child! O God, have mercy on me!"

The old man sank back in a chair, and covered his eyes with his hands.

"There is not a moment to be lost!" exclaimed the stranger. "I followed her to the park, as you bade me, and heard all. She warned him of his danger, bade him flee the country, and never see her again."

The old Pole still sat motionless.

"Rouse yourself!" exclaimed his companion; "Janovitch has the address. He knows the house he was to come to. The police may be upon us at any moment!"

Slowly the old man rose. "Yes," he exclaimed, "time is precious. For myself I care not, but my oath must be fulfilled ere I die."

"What would you do?"

"What I have sworn to do," answered the old man. "He will not come here now. I must seek him out, and kill him while I have still my liberty. The police here might detain us on his sworn information that he went in terror of his life."

Paul Doubrowski opened a drawer of the escritoire that stood in his room, and drew out a pistol.

At that moment there was a loud knocking at the door.

The stranger opened it, and Feodora, pale and breathless, entered the house.

She ran towards her father, but he motioned her away.

"Father!" she exclaimed; "hear me! I come to tell you all. I could not betray him!"

- "But you have betrayed us!"
- "No, father; I told him nothing except that his life was in danger."
 - "You did not tell him at whose hands?"
 - "No!"
- "She speaks the truth!" said the stranger, who had been looking through the window. "Nicolai Janovitch is coming. He has followed her!"

The man spoke truly. Nicolai Janovitch, when Feodora, after her strange words, had darted from him, had determined to follow her. Never for a moment connecting the threatened assassination with her or her family, he had determined to know more, and to find out who his strange protectress was.

Feodora would have rushed out and warned him, but her father held her as in a vice.

"Admit him!" he said; and the foreigner went to the door, and let Nicolai Janovitch in.

The young man was shown up stairs into a room which Paul Doubrowski called his study. It was a room of which the window had been bricked up, and it was lit with an oil-lamp.

Nicolai sat down, and looked about him. On the wall was a picture of a handsome-looking lad of about sixteen, and underneath it some writing in Russian.

Nicolai rose to examine it, and started back.

This is what he read:

"Wladislas Doubrowski, murdered by Nicolai Janovitch, 18th March, 1863. 'An eye for an eye—a tooth for a tooth—a son for a son.'"

In one moment he saw the trap into which he had fallen. He remembered that his father had assisted in quelling the Polish insurrection. This, then, was the meaning of Feodora's warning.

He rushed to the door to open it, and found it locked. He called for help, and no answer came.

Down below, the old man, his daughter, and the stranger sat. Feodora, her face white with terror, moved her lips silently in prayer.

Doubrowski was writing: "To Colonel Janovitch,—When you receive this your only son will be lying dead, murdered in his fresh young youth. You will have done unto you as you did to others. He dies to avenge Wladislas Doubrowski, who fell, butchered by your hand, March 18th, 1863. I leave you to endure the life-long agony I have suffered. It is a bitterer punishment than death.—PAUL DOUBROWSKI."

The stranger took the letter, and departed, after a few whispered words with the old man.

When he had gone, Doubrowski touched Feodora gently on the arm.

- "Come, my child, we set out on our travels to-night."
- "Oh, father, spare him!—spare him!" she moaned. "I love him so!"
- "My child, I do not wish to hurt the young man. He is up stairs: you can hear him walking about. Come, let us leave him alone."

Feodora could hardly believe her ears.

- "Are you going to leave him here?" she said.
- "Certainly, my child. My hand shall not injure a hair of his head. I have altered my mind. Only, as you have told him so much, we must leave him locked up while we get clear away, unless you wish me to end my days in prison."
- "No, father; no!" cried Feodora. "I will go with you. Thank God, his life is safe!"

In five minutes the old Pole and his daughter left the house, and all was silence.

It was nine o'clock, when a carriage dashed up to the door, and an elderly Russian gentleman and the stranger we have seen before leapt out.

"This way," said the stranger. "I have a pass key to the side door."

Colonel Janovitch—for it was he—followed his conductor eagerly. He had come to save his son from a terrible death. The stranger had betrayed his companion, and told the colonel that ten was the time fixed for his assassination.

"Come quickly!" shouted the stranger, passing into the house. "The old man has gone out to seek assistance!"

As the colonel ran up the stairs, he heard his boy's voice calling him.

He answered him.

Nicolai's heart leapt for joy; his father had come to save him!

Guided by his son's shout, the old colonel reached the room where he was imprisoned.

The key was outside the door.

To turn it was the work of a moment. The next instant the colonel flung the door open. As he did so there was a loud report, a shriek of agony, and a crash like an earthquake.

Colonel Janovitch reeled backward, and fell where he stood. When he rose, he crawled, bleeding and faint as he was, through the smoke to a form which lay among the ruins of the wrecked apartment.

Nicolai Janovitch lay mangled and bloody upon the floor. By an ingenious device, the door of the apartment

had been connected with an infernal machine concealed beneath the floor.

Whoever opened the door sealed the doom of its occupant.

Paul Doubrowski and the stranger had lured the father into being the son's executioner. Wladislas was avenged, and Feodora had striven in vain to save her lover.

The story of the explosion is still remembered in the quiet street in Kentish Town. All that was known was that two Russian gentlemen were found there, and how they came there always remained a mystery.

The old Pole and his daughter were seen no more, but immediately after the explosion the neighbours declare they saw someone moving about in the house.

It must have been the strange foreigner removing all traces of the mechanism by which the fearful tragedy had been caused, and searching the bodies for papers. When the police came in, nothing was found except the dead body of the young man and the senseless form of the old one lying near him, and still breathing. Colonel Janovitch died from the injuries without recovering consciousness, but no letter was found upon him.

The stranger took care of that. The picture of Wladislas Doubrowski had also disappeared.

The strange explosion and the death of two Russian gentlemen was a nine days' wonder. Mr. and Mrs. Brown were quite certain now that the Doubrowskis were conspirators, and the police accounted for the tragic occurrence very easily.

They will tell you at Scotland-yard, if you ask, that these Russian gentlemen were evidently connected with foreign conspirators, who met at the house to conduct experiments in bombs, infernal machines, and other political toys, and that they fell victims to their own scientific researches.

Over in Paris there is a young girl with a thin white face, blue eyes, and flaxen hair, who every day, when it is fine, leads an old Polish gentleman, her father, to his favourite seat in the Tuileries, and sits by him silent and melancholy She could tell you a different story.

No. XVIII.

BURIED BY THE PARISH.

- "JOB SCUDDER, for God's sake, don't refuse me!"
- "My good woman, I've told you once and for all I ain't got the money."
- "Don't say that, Job; you're rich; everybody knows you are. 'Tisn't much I ask. Lend me five pounds to save Tim being buried by the parish, and I'll work my fingers to the bone. I'll starve, but I'll pay you back, Job."

Mr. Job Scudder shook his head. "Can't do it, I tell you. Very sorry. There's my bell. Good afternoon."

Job Scudder went quickly up the passage of the hotel at which he was head waiter, and left Mrs. O'Sullivan standing at the door. He did not go so quickly, however, as to lose the parting address which was sent after him.

"My curse upon you, Job Scudder! Maybe you'll come to be buried by the parish yourself, in spite of all your grand airs now."

Then Mrs. O'Sullivan turned her pale face to the street, and went sorrowfully away, and called in at the workhouse to say that she had been unable to raise any money, and so Tim must have a pauper's funeral.

"Poor dear, it 'ud break his heart, if he knew," she exclaimed, as she confided her sorrows to the parish officer, "for he was always a proud 'un, was Tim. Ah, it's hard as him as has been so free with his money, and helped so

many when he could, shouldn't have a friend to help him now."

It was hard. No one who knew Tim O'Sullivan's story would deny it. When he was head waiter at the big chophouse in the City, he was thought a great deal of and looked up to. The customers always believed that he came down in a brougham, and the story got about that when his employer, a well-known caterer, was hard up, Tim, the head waiter, would lend him a few thousands to go on with. At any rate, Tim was a character in the City, and must have made a very good income, and he had considerable influence, for a word of recommendation from him was the best reference a young waiter could have.

Many and many a kind deed was credited to O'Sullivan, and none kinder perhaps than his conduct to young Job Scudder. Job's father was an under waiter at the chophouse—a good fellow, but given to pot bottoms and impecuniosity. These two things managed to settle the elder Scudder between them, and when he died his widow was found to be penniless and consumptive, and quite unable to do anything for Job junior.

Mr. O'Sullivan came to the rescue; he heard of the deplorable state of affairs; he got up a subscription among the customers for Mrs. Scudder, and he took Job on, gave him a suit of clothes, and, first as boy and afterwards as waiter, employed him at the restaurant, made a smart waiter of him, and presently got him a berth in a first-class hotel, where the position was good, and the tips were large enough to make a poor curate's mouth water.

Job Scudder got on, and O'Sullivan lost sight of him for a time. When they met again the wheel of fortune had revolved for both of them. It was when Job was head waiter of one of the best hotels in a Midland county that a shabby old gentleman applied to him for the situation of coffee-room waiter which was vacant, and at the first words the men recognised each other.

It was Tim O'Sullivan who was applying to Job Scudder for assistance.

Job took him on. It was while they were together at this hotel Job learnt the story of his patron's fall.

O'Sullivan had saved a large sum of money, and the rumour about his obliging his employer with occasional loans was quite true. After some twelve years' service at this famous restaurant, Mr. O'Sullivan had amassed in salary, douceurs, presents, &c., the very respectable sum of five thousand pounds, of which his employer had borrowed half, at 5 per cent.

But by-and-by things began to go queer with the old-fashioned place. People travelled, and brought home foreign ideas of eating. Chops and steaks and homely English fare served in high boxes like pews began to pall upon the taste of a new generation, and right and left of the old houses there sprang up restaurants all gilt and glitter and glass, where the dishes were French, the waiters German, and only the brandy and cigars supplied at the counter British. Young ladies with golden hair and cherry bows smirked and smiled behind those counters as an extra attraction, and the golden youth of the City deserted the high pews and the old-fashioned waiters for the gaily-decorated tables, the golden-haired sirens, and the tempting Parisian cookery of the rival establishments.

When custom began to fall off, and only a few old fogeys were left, O'Sullivan's employer began to pull a long face and talk about retiring, and he spoke to his head waiter about it. They had several conversations on the matter, and at last it was decided the business should be sold.

It was got rid of eventually for a fair price, all things considered. The proprietor retired to the country, and Tim, who had been repaid out of the proceeds of the sale, found himself with five thousand pounds and nothing to do.

You know the old proverb about Satan and idle hands? Tim O'Sullivan's Satan was not long in coming. The idle hands held five thousand pounds, and that was an extra inducement to Satan.

The tempter turned up in the shape of a West-end waiter with capital, who had a scheme in his head which was bound to lead to a gigantic fortune. He wanted a partner with five thousand pounds, and so he confided his scheme to O'Sullivan. There was an old pleasure-garden across the water which was falling into decay. Why not take it and make a second Cremorne of it? The scheme was perfect when it was submitted to Tim, and he took to it amazingly. On paper fortune was certain, and the business was so lively—so different from the monotony of the City chop-house. The upshot of half-a-dozen meetings at a solicitor's office, and a dozen conversations in various places, was, that an announcement appeared in the papers stating that the Royal Kent Gardens would shortly be opened to the public, under the direction of Messrs. Jones (the other waiter) and O'Sullivan. It was a tremendous programme which the new partners submitted to the public. It was to be the Alhambra and Cremorne rolled into one, amusements day and night, and a grand hotel and restaurant on the premises, where dinners and suppers of the most recherché kind could be obtained.

The outlay necessary to make the decayed and long

disused gardens respectable, and the enormous preliminary expenses, made such an inroad into the united capitals that it was with a sigh of relief O'Sullivan saw the opening day approaching when a little of the money cast upon the waters would begin to float back again through the turnstiles.

But, alas! from the very first moment the affair was a failure. People came for a time, when the excitement of the opening was on, and the expenses were not considered in the desire to attract; but gradually the public found that the place was "out of the way." The West-end didn't care to make a journey into an unknown district—a sort of social Central Africa—on the chance of being bored; and the East-end paid its sixpence admission and brought its own refreshments, which arrangement, it need hardly be said, left the balance of profit on the side of the visitor instead of the proprietor.

For six months the Royal Kent Gardens, freighted with the hopes and the fortunes of two ex-waiters, floated slowly towards the rock-bound coast of Basinghall-street. At last it struck with terrific force, and went down at Bankruptcy Point, a place inhabited by a remorseless race of wreckers. They are called accountants and liquidators, but there is nothing in their costume or speech to distinguish them from other tribes inhabiting these islands. The wreckers soon seized the battered hulk of the Royal Kent Gardens, and set to work at it so well that in a very short time they had carried off everything, leaving the two captains without a penny in the world.

It is with Tim O'Sullivan only that we have to concern ourselves. The loss of his money broke him down. He went home to his anxious wife one night, and told her the terrible truth. All their years of honest labour and thrift had ended in this—Ruin! Their comfortable little home—all the little household treasures which they had gathered about them—would have to go, and they would have to start life again at the wrong end.

Mrs. O'Sullivan thanked God they had no children, yet once the lack of a child's voice in the quiet house had been the great trouble of her life.

She was a brave little woman. She had one big cry when she knew the worst, then she put her knuckles well into her eyes to stop the tears, and, with a trembling voice, bade her husband be of good cheer. They were healthy and strong, and they didn't want much. Tim must go into service again, and perhaps, with luck, he'd be able to save money once more—and keep it. Tim let himself be comforted, and went out boldly to look for a berth. He got one, but he lost it again. It wasn't that he had fallen off in his capacity as a waiter, but he wasn't so quick and agreeable to the customers as he had been, and he forgot things.

Do what he would, he couldn't help thinking and grieving over the past, and then he got muddled and queer in his head, and at last he forgot a dinner ordered at the hotel where he was waiter. The dinner was ordered at breakfast time for four. Tim got thinking about his troubles, and somehow or other the thing slipped completely out of his mind.

Back to his time came the gentleman and his three friends, and there was no dinner ready. Tim got the sack there and then, and it was some time before he got a berth again.

At last he heard of a situation at an hotel in the Midland counties. He had been on a race-week job, as extra hand

in a neighbouring hotel, and he applied for the berth, and found that the poor little fatherless Job Scudder, whom he had befriended and started in life in the old days of his prosperity, was now his master.

But what a different Job Scudder he was! He had grown quite proud and pompous, for he was making a good bit of money, and the customers had taken to him. It was "Job, do this," and "Job, do that"; and the proprietress of the hotel, being a widow, left a good deal to Job, so that in time he almost fancied himself the proprietor of the place.

Job's word was law in that house so far as the servants were concerned. It was no good complaining to the missus; she only said, "Mr. Job has my authority to settle the matter; you must speak to Mr. Job."

Tim O'Sullivan soon began to find out that his former kindness to Scudder was almost forgotten, and would avail him very little. "I can't make no fav'rites," Job would say, whenever he felt inclined to wig his former master; "it sets a bad example."

Tim bit his lip, and said nothing, for his faults had been very trifling; but he thought to himself, considering everything, Job might have been kinder.

Things, however, went on fairly well until, one fatal day, without meaning the slightest harm, O'Sullivan, in conversation with the other servants, let out that he had been Job's master once, and that Job's father had died in poor circumstances. The story was told naturally, and without the slightest malice; but a very different version of it was carried to Job's ears.

All the pride of the upstart revolted at the idea of the servants knowing he had once existed on this shabby, shambling coffee-room waiter's charity.

He held his peace, and bided his time. The next day a customer complained of a plate being dirty which O'Sullivan had brought to him. That evening O'Sullivan received his wages to date in the office, and notice to quit from the proprietress.

He went, trembling and downcast, to Job, and begged him to say a good word for him. He found it so hard to get a berth now, and he wasn't so strong and able to rough it as he had been.

Job said he was very sorry, but it was no good talking to him. The missus said he was to go, and it wasn't anybody's place to interfere with what the missus said.

So Tim O'Sullivan went out again into the world with his wages in his pocket. He felt wild with himself, cross with Job, low, and dispirited. He should have to go back to London, where his wife was paying the rent of a little room with her needle, and live on her till he could get another place.

He felt cold and miserable and low. Before going to the station to take the London train, he went into a publichouse and called for some hot whisky. The whisky warmed and cheered him; he had some more, and grew talkative. There was another man there at the bar who said he was a waiter out of place, and to him O'Sullivan poured out the story of his wrongs, and then they had another glass together, and another.

The train to London went without Tim O'Sullivan that night. When he woke up in the morning he felt a strange pain in his head, and found that it was bandaged up. He looked round the room, and asked where he was, and they told him in the hospital. He had been brutally knocked about and robbed. He had been found in a side street late

at night with his head cut and bleeding, and his pockets turned inside out.

Two months, now better and now worse, Tim O'Sullivan lay in the hospital, and Job never came once nor sent.

The hospital people sent a letter to Tim's wife at his request, telling her how ill he was, and in a week she was by his side. She looked so pale and thin and worn the man hardly knew her.

"How did you get here, Nell?" he said.

"Oh, I managed it, Tim," she answered, with a faint smile. "I got a lift from town to town."

She never told him that she had walked the whole distance from town, living on bread and water, and sleeping where she could, that every penny she had might be spent on the sick man.

She got some little employment in the town where he lay ill. She earned enough to keep life together, hoping to brave through the bad time till her husband was well and about again, and able to earn money.

But Tim O'Sullivan never earned any more money. Just when the doctors thought he was going to improve, he took a change for the worse. The mischief to the head developed in an unexpected way, and it was supposed something had formed on the brain, for the agony became worse and worse, and the man seemed almost mad.

He grew quieter by degrees, and at last he made no complaint at all.

"Thank goodness, he's quiet at last," exclaimed the nurse, who had been disturbed several nights by the sick man's screams. "He's dropped off to sleep."

Tim O'Sullivan had dropped off to sleep, and so soundly that nothing ever woke him again.

When the poor wife came and found her husband dead, she hid her grief, and then asked what she was to do about the funeral.

It was more than hinted to her at the hospital that if she had an important engagement in town she might go back, and not trouble about the matter. The doctors would have a post-mortem examination to ascertain the cause of death, and they would be very glad, if Mrs. O'Sullivan had no objection, to keep Mr. O'Sullivan's body altogether.

But Mrs. O'Sullivan had a very strong objection to poor Tim ending his days in small pieces for the amusement of a crowd of giggling boys, and she said so. After the postmortem she would see her husband decently buried.

"Very well," said the house-surgeon. "Then the body will be given up to you, if you can bury it yourself—or to the parish, if you can't."

The parish! Buried by the parish! Her Tim—the man who had been so good and generous, and such a loving husband to her for thirty years! No; the idea was too horrible. She would get the money somewhere. She would go to Job. Surely he would save his old benefactor from the last disgrace of a pauper's funeral.

Mrs. O'Sullivan went to Job Scudder, and managed to see him. She preferred her request, but with what success we have already seen. Mr. Scudder positively refused a five-pound note, and couldn't see what possible objection any sensible corpse could have to getting a funeral for nothing. He felt that it was one of those stuck-up notions which are very much out of place in poor people, and he bade the wife of his former benefactor good morning.

But her parting words he heard, and they remained in his memory. The idea of his being buried by the parish was too absurd. Why, he had already saved nearly enough money to retire to-morrow, if he chose.

Tim O'Sullivan had his pauper's funeral, and his wife passed on into the great crowd, to be heard of no more by the prosperous head waiter of the County Hotel.

The years went by, and Job Scudder grew fatter and more pompous than ever as his capital accumulated. He loved his money, and that was the only thing he did love. He had never married, and hadn't a relative in the world he cared about. At last his importance became so tremendous that he found it difficult to be civil to the customers. He felt there was something preposterous in the idea of a great man like himself, with money in the bank, money in railways, money in foreign loans, and money in municipal trusts, having to say "Yes, sir," to some poor devil of a customer who perhaps gave himself airs on an income of two hundred a year.

He felt it was time for him to retire from the profession, and devote himself to employing his capital advantageously. With all his love of money, Job was a speculator. He had a great idea of letting money get money. He liked to look upon his sovereigns as so many golden snowballs which rolled along gathering more gold as they went.

When at last, having taken a decisive step and comfortable apartments in the town, he found himself an independent man of means, Job plunged heart and soul into the business of money-getting. He became a great authority upon stocks and shares; and while other men were studying the sporting columns of the papers, he always turned to the money article.

He invested every penny of his money, and always in that which would bring him the biggest interest. He had Spanish bonds, and Turkish bonds, and bonds of those snug little States in South America which were so generous in the matter of interest.

For a year or two all went on swimmingly, and his speculations were prosperous to a degree. He got his big interest, lived on next to nothing, and invested the interest again so that it might bring him more.

Many a time when he was adding up his possessions, and putting down his annual income in pencil on old billheads of the hotel, he would think of Mrs. O'Sullivan's words and laugh. The idea of his being buried by the parish!

It was just when he was most satisfied with the pecuniary result of his investments that things took a turn. A period of commercial depression set in, which developed itself with energy. Foreign states began to repudiate their liabilities; home investments once considered sound began to depreciate rapidly in value.

Job became alarmed for some of his securities, and rushed off to his broker for advice. The advice given him was sensible, but Job wouldn't take it. Panic had set in, and Job was one of the nervous holders who helped to make matters worse.

His broker pointed out that to sell at panic prices would be disastrous, but Job would not listen to him. He would save what he could; he must make up the loss another way.

The first result of the panic to Job was a heavy loss of capital, but he got the bulk of his money out of the fire. He held the bright yellow gold instead of the flimsy paper that might some day become absolutely worthless.

He kept his money in the bank idle for a week, and then began to fret. His money was carning him nothing. What was the paltry 3 per cent, the bank allowed to him who had been getting 7 and 8?

He read money articles and prospectuses of new concerns, promising 10 per cent., till the figures danced before his eyes. He half determined for a 6 per cent. investment which seemed sound, and then he thought perhaps it would be better to wait till something turned up at 7.

At last he decided on the 6 per cent., and invested his money again. He hadn't had the security a month before an alarmist article in one of the papers made him ill.

He lay awake all one night, worrying about his money, and the next morning decided to realise there and then. He made a further heavy loss, for the alarmist article had had its effect; but he sold, and got some of his money out of the fire. This time he determined to hold it safe—he would pass no more nights of agony. He kept out of speculation for two whole months, and during that time he was utterly miserable.

He groaned over his diminished income—over the interest he ought to have been getting, and was not. Suddenly a magnificent means of employing idle capital was vouchsafed to the British public. An enterprising gentleman—a man of such unblemished reputation and probity that he lectured on religion, and always carried a prayer-book in his pocket—started a bank for the benefit of his fellow-creatures. It was called the Co-operative Bank, and those who were wise enough to deposit their money with the unblemished religious gentleman received 10 per cent. for it. The philanthropic proprietor of the bank made no mystery of the reason he was able to allow such interest for deposits. The marvellous system of co-operation did it all. Instead of being selfish, like the worldly-minded magnates of

Lombard-street, who make fortunes out of depositors and spend the profits on themselves, this gentleman shared the profits with the customers. The bank had its own organ of publicity, which chronicled the prosperity of the concern most faithfully, and the manager also sent pamphlets broadcast over the country.

Job Scudder studied the pamphlet carefully, and he also read the bank's newspaper. He even went up to town and saw the manager. Everything was explained to his satisfaction, even the scandalous libels which were circulated by other bankers against the concern. Job quite understood, after an hour's interview with the philanthropist, why the newspapers ran the Co-operative Bank down. They were all in the pay of Lombard-street, and Lombard-street was frightened. It knew if this novel bank was a success it would have to shut up. Who would deposit money at 3 per cent. when he could get 10?

With the exception of a very small sum, the whole of Job's capital still remaining went over the counter of the Co-operative Bank—and it never came back again.

A fortnight afterwards the philanthropist, who had covered the London hoardings with posters and filled the provincial papers with advertisements and "communicated" articles, made his public appearance at a police-court on a charge of swindling. When arrested, he had a hymn-book in the black bag which he carried, but not even this dumb witness to probity and virtue availed him. He was ultimately found guilty of fraud, and sent to prison.

This last heavy loss broke Job Scudder's gold-worshipping heart. Then the words of Tim O'Sullivan's wife rang in his ears, and would not be shut out—" Maybe you'll come to be buried by the parish yourself." He dreamt about it

by night, and by day it haunted him. He clutched the little bag of gold still remaining as though he would save it for his funeral. He did more. He sealed up in an envelope a ten-pound note on the County Bank, and wrote outside it, "To pay for my funeral." This he carried about with him wherever he went.

A year afterwards, his gold gone, his belongings sold stick by stick, Job Scudder lay sick unto death in a little room in a side street. His mind was wandering. Now he was a millionaire; now he was in the workhouse. At times he would see a ghostly form by his side, and would wave it back.

"I sha'n't be buried by the parish, woman!" he would shout—"I sha'n't! The money's here—here!" and then he would clutch the pillow beneath which lay the sealed envelope.

One afternoon the people of the house came into his room and found him dead. He died utterly penniless, in debt even for the rent of his miserable apartment.

Underneath the dead man's pillow they found the sealed envelope. Outside it was written, "To pay for my funeral."

They opened it, and found a ten-pound note on the County Bank. The bank had stopped payment that very morning, and the note was worthless.

Job Scudder was buried by the parish after all.

No. XIX.

COALS OF FIRE.

JACK EFFINGHAM stood smoking his cigar in the Liver-pool terminus of the London and North-Western Railway. He was a handsome fellow of five-and-thirty, with dark eyes and hair, and a smile that men called "pleasant" and women "charming." There was a professional look about the young man, which the shaven face heightened and the elaborate fur travelling coat confirmed.

"By Jove, I wish Nell would come," he said a little nervously to himself; "I hope nothing has happened."

It was evident from the uneasy manner of the fur-coated traveller, and the quick glances which he cast at the people moving about the station, that he wasn't quite comfortable.

All things considered, and the possession of a conscience granted, there was small wonder that Jack Effingham was uncomfortable. He was a professional singer, and he was about to take ship from Liverpool for America. He was a married man, with one child, a little baby girl of two, but neither Mrs. Effingham nor little Blanche was to accompany him. In fact, Mrs. Effingham didn't know her husband was going to leave the country. He was on a provincial tour, and that tour included Liverpool, but no one would have been more astonished than Mrs. Effingham at the scene which presently was enacted at Liverpool Railway Station, and in which her husband sustained the leading male rôle.

A young lady dressed in black, and closely veiled, had come softly up to him, and touched his arm.

Not a word more on either side, only the lady laid her trembling hand upon Jack's arm, and together they went out into the town.

People who had seen them meet might have put them down as husband and wife—or brother and sister; but few would have suspected the actual state of affairs.

Jack and the veiled young lady in deep black were going to America together. It was what the police-court reporter describes as an elopement. Nellie Vaughan, the daughter of a surgeon in London, had fallen violently in love with the handsome singer, and he had not been slow to encourage the girl's romantic passion, leading her from the first to believe that he was a single man.

On tour handsome Jack Effingham was a single man—his encumbrances, in the shape of a wife and child, were stowed away in a little house in South Lambeth; and if he sent home a small portion of his weekly salary, Jack considered he had very nobly done his duty as a husband.

The marriage had not been a happy one. Mrs. Effingham was not one of those women who can bow down and worship a man because he happens to be good looking. She didn't understand the art of flattery; and as flattery was what Jack was accustomed to, he began to resent his wife's attitude towards him. Mrs. Effingham, unfortunately, saw her husband when the glamour of the footlights was not on him. To her eyes all the little meannesses and weaknesses of a good-looking and popular professional were revealed. In the atmosphere of home the whitening flaked off, and the sepulchre, in all its grim loathsomeness, was evident. So Mr. and Mrs. Effingham weren't very

[&]quot;Jack!"

[&]quot;Nellie!"

happy together. The poor little woman did her best, but she couldn't worship; and, worship being a necessity for Jack, he looked abroad for it.

When the baby was born, matters didn't mend. Jack, who had long ceased to look for worship, now found himself denied even attention. Perhaps, if the little I have told you has enabled you to grasp what manner of man this handsome singer was, you will be able to understand me when I say that he was jealous of his own child.

During the time that his professional duties kept him in London, he found the baby master of the establishment. His favourite chair was generally occupied by Blanchie's wardrobe; his meerschaum pipe and his prized cigar-holder would be given to Blanchie to play with; and when, at Mrs. Effingham's command, he honoured his offspring with a fatherly kiss, it was ten to one that Blanchie would either put her thumb in his eye, or scratch his face with her sharp little nails. It was not only by day that matrimony and its result weighed upon the singer's mind. He would come home late at night—or rather early in the morning from the Artistic Club, where the whisky was strong and the stories were good, and he would put his head upon the pillow and desire to fall asleep. Even this privilege Blanchie would sometimes deny him, entertaining papa with a little concert on her own account, which banished sleep from his eyes for hours.

Handsome Jack Effingham, petted, flattered, and caressed out of doors, began to chafe more and more. A hundred times he cursed his folly for getting married and marring his future. And when he was on tour, and treasury day came, it was an awful nuisance to have to send a big lump of his salary up to town for rent and butcher's bills, and

other little items incidental to being a married man. He envied those of his companions who were single, and had no home cares to worry them; but his greatest trouble was that, having condescended to sacrifice himself and take all this burden upon him, the woman for whom he had done it positively refused to look upon him as a hero.

But, if Mrs. Effingham didn't think him a great genius and a glorious fellow, there were plenty of ladies who did. One of them was Nellie Vaughan, the surgeon's daughter, who met Jack at a charity concert first, where she was singing as an amateur, and who took many occasions to meet him afterwards, for she had fallen desperately in love with him.

It is only fair to Nellie to say that she never dreamed her Adonis was married. She fell in love with him believing he was a man she might one day marry, and Jack encouraged her in the idea.

Matters progressed until Jack began to be very uncomfortable. He had surrendered himself wholly to this new passion, and every day dangerous words trembled on his lips. After a time the girl's father died. Jack was on tour. She wrote him that she was alone in the world, that she had a little money, and that she thought she should like to utilise her voice and enter the profession. Jack answered the letter, and grew bold as he wrote; bolder still when he wrote again, and at last the Rubicon was passed.

Knowing that he had a wife and child dependent on him, Jack invited Nellie Vaughan to be his wife. He was going to America—would she go with him? If so, why need there be any delay? Let her come to him at Liverpool; there he would marry her, and they could sail for the States at once, where he was sure they would do well.

He told her that there were family reasons why he wished to leave England for a time—how very family poor Nellie never suspected.

She cried tears of joy over the letter, for her love was real and true, and she wrote off accepting the offer at once. We have seen her meet her lover at the Liverpool Station. All arrangements had been made in advance by Effingham. In a week they were married quietly, and on the day following the wedding they stepped on board the good ship City of Brentford, bound for New York. Jack Effingham signed the marriage register in another name. He told his wife that Effingham was only his professional appellation. It was untrue. He was married quietly, and under a false name, in order that he might hide all traces of his guilt if possible.

From Liverpool he wrote a letter to his wife. He bade her sell the furniture and all the property he had left, and do the best she could with it. He told her that he had made a mistake in marrying—he acknowledged he was a villain to leave her, but he could no longer struggle with fate. Henceforth he asked her to consider him dead. This effusion he signed "Your coward husband." He posted it on the day the vessel sailed for New York, and by the time the deserted wife received it he was well out to sea.

He was going to begin a new life, he said to himself. Nellie would worship him, and give way to him. She could sing, and she had money. Together they would do very well, and be very happy. Nellie was more suited to him, he said to himself—she was sensible of the honour of being his wife, and he had a certain amount of love—or passion, let us call it—for the beautiful young girl which the poor plain sweetheart of his earlier days had never aroused.

So he sailed over the seas with the woman who believed she was his lawful wife; and in the little villa at South Lambeth the real Mrs. Effingham, who in her heart loved the handsome scoundrel only too well, sat red-eyed and sobbing, hugging baby Blanchie to her breast, and wondering if Jack would ever come back to her, or if she was never to see him again.

She reproached herself, poor foolish woman. In memory she went over all their married life again, and persuaded herself that she had not treated Jack well—that she might have been kinder to him. Then she looked down at the helpless infant, left fatherless, and her remorse changed to resentment.

Clara Effingham was not the woman to sit down and cry long. She saw what was before her, and made up her mind to encounter it bravely. She realised the property her husband had left behind him, and went to live in cheap apartments. She had been a music governess when Jack married her, and she took to the profession again. She was only an ordinary teacher, and the money she earned was not great; but she managed by industry and thrift to keep a little home about her, and to put by something for little Blanchie's education when she was old enough to want one.

So the years went on, but no news came of Jack. She never knew where he had gone. Once she heard, in a roundabout way, that he was singing in America, and, once, looking over a professional journal, she saw that he had been in San Francisco.

She never troubled to find him out, and trace his whereabouts. He had deserted her—let him go. If he could leave her all those years without a line—without one word

of inquiry after their child—he was not the man for any woman to break her heart about.

Some twelve years after her grass widowhood commenced, Mrs. Effingham died, leaving Blanche all she had, which, in worldly goods, was very little. But she had done her duty by the child, and had given her a good education, and, more than that, everyone who knew her saw there was a brilliant future before Blanche Effingham. She had a beautiful soprano voice, and every effort had been made to train it. The girl's talent and natural gift had excited the admiration of a well-known and wealthy musical amateur, and when Mrs. Effingham lay on her deathbed, her last hours were soothed by the knowledge that this gentleman and his wife had promised to take charge of Blanche, complete her musical education, and see her fairly started on the road that leads to wealth and fame, when a girl can sing as Blanche could.

The gentleman kept his word, and shortly after her mother's death Blanche Effingham was sent to Italy to study under the first masters, and to see what Italian art could do to perfect and enhance the value of her natural gift. Three years were profitably spent there, and Italian masters prophesied great things for the young English girl, and their prophecies were fulfilled. Beginning discreetly and quietly as a concert-room singer, Blanche Effingham rapidly rose in the world of song, and in her twenty-second year Mdlle. Blanche Effi was prima-donna of one of the first English opera companies travelling the country, and promised at no distant date to be worthy the attention of one of the great opera houses of London itself.

Let us leave Blanche Effingham secure in the artistic position she has attained, and take a trip across the Atlantic in search of the father who deserted her nineteen years before, and from that day had never troubled to know what the fate of his wife and child had been.

* * * * * *

"Hullo, governor! Waiting for Belle?"

" Yes."

"Ah! you'll have to wait a good bit yet. Better go home."

The stage-door keeper of the big Variety Theatre in New York spoke kindly enough to the seedy-looking, middle-aged man in a slouched hat and velveteen coat, who was pacing up and down in the enclosed passage, stamping his feet to keep them warm. There was, indeed, a dash of respect in his voice, for the individual he addressed was a professional who had once been a star in his way.

"No, I won't go home," answered the man; "I'll wait for Belle!"

"Well, look here, Mr. Effingham, I may as well tell you straight, it's Miss's orders as you ain't to wait."

"Why not?" asked Jack Effingham, for it was he, looking up anxiously in the doorkeeper's face.

"Here she comes—ask her," answered the man. At that moment a handsome, dark-eyed girl, muffled in costly furs, came from her dressing-room into the passage which led to the street.

It was Belle Effingham, the dashing burlesque actress, the pet of the New York golden youth, and the daughter of Jack Effingham, the shabby fellow in the velveteen coat and slouched hat. Jack had evidently come down in the world, judging by his get-up and his manner. The fact is, he was no longer a star. Drink and trouble had made a wreck of him; and after having sunk to the level of a chorus singer,

his unsteady habits had even rendered it a difficult matter for him to get a decent engagement even in that unremunerative branch of operatic art.

"It's no good your waiting, father; I've nothing to say to you," said Belle, as she attempted to pass.

"Belle, my dear," whined the man; "upon my word, I wouldn't bother if I could help it; but I'm broke—stone broke. Belle, I haven't had a meal to-day."

"It's always the same tale, father. Every penny I give you you spend in drink. I'm not going to help you to kill yourself."

"Ain't I your father!" exclaimed the man fiercely. "Don't you owe everything to me?"

"No, I don't," answered the girl. "I owe you nothing. The only friend I ever had in the world was mother, and you broke her heart—you know you did. I hate you for it!"

"And this is my child!" whined the man, who, if he hadn't eaten, had evidently allayed his thirst lately. "This is my child, that I trained and educated, and made a star of!"

"Yes; to live on my earnings, to take every penny I made and squander it in drink, while mother was dying for proper care and nourishment. But you're not going to do it again. Every week I'll pay your rent and give you five dollars. You can earn more if you like to, but you won't earn a penny when you can get money out of me."

"Give me next week's money now, then, Belle, and I won't ask you again."

"No; you'll spend it at the first drinking saloon you pass. Hiram, see me to my carriage."

The stage-door keeper hustled Jack Effingham out of the way, saw Belle into the vehicle, and bade the coachman drive off.

"Curse her!" growled the seedy chorus singer, as the mud from the wheels splashed up into his face. "Curse her for a proud, hard-hearted jade! She's rolling in money, and won't give her father a few dollars to keep the life in him."

Belle Effingham was not a fond daughter. She had led a life which had soured what little affection there had ever been in the girl's nature. She had watched her mother—the only being she ever really cared for—pine and die slowly under her father's neglect and ill-usage. All the money they earned he squandered in drink and dissipation. When the mother died, Effingham lived on the daughter as long as she would let him. Belle earned good money, but it all went. At last the girl refused to be beggared any longer. She had a high spirit, and was a determined young woman when she had set her mind on anything.

She gave her father fair warning that if he molested her she would resign her engagement, and then the small allowance she agreed to make him would be lost. She managed to free herself from the incubus, and to protect her earnings. He pestered her continually, but he found her firm. Not one penny over the allowance did Belle let her father frighten or coax out of her.

He could still earn money as a chorus singer if he liked, and now and then, when he got right down on his luck, he would look out for a berth and work for a week or two. But it was always ten to one he would be dismissed for being drunk before the engagement was a fortnight old.

He had always, even in his brutal drunkenness, hesitated to tell poor Nellie Vaughan or her daughter that they had no right to his name. He would have blurted it out to Belle, but he knew that would be the signal for the complete stoppage of supplies.

At last Belle, annoyed beyond measure by the persistent pestering of the seedy old chorus singer, left New York on a tour, and went right away, telling her father that she should have no more to do with him; that, as he wouldn't leave her alone, he must look to his own exertions for the future; she should trouble no more about him.

It was a stormy interview, and before it was over Jack Effingham shrieked out in his rage the secret he had kept for years.

Belle listened to him with a pale face, and bit her lip.

"Thank God, I have no right to your name!" she said, bitterly. "I always thought you were a scoundrel; but I never suspected you of such villainy as this."

The man was sorry the moment afterwards. Not because of the pain it might cause his poor dead victim's daughter, but because he saw Belle considered her moral obligation towards him at an end.

He was quite right. From that day Belle never sent him a penny. She disowned him utterly, and returned a begging letter which he sent after her unopened.

For a year after the final separation of father and daughter, Jack Effingham lived a precarious existence—now earning a little, now living on such charity as the professional people who had known him in better days chose to fling him.

In the winter of the following year he got ill and queer, and was sobered a bit by a dangerous attack. Charity nursed him through it, and in the spring he was about again, broken down, and weak, and hard up.

An old friend, whose friendship had been true and tried, again got him an engagement in the chorus. A big operatic season was to be inaugurated in New York. A

famous company was coming from London to appear in English opera, and with it the prima-donna who had made such a sensation lately—the famous Mdlle. Effi.

The theatrical papers of New York were full of paragraphs concerning the coming star. Her salary was declared to be something fabulous, and her voice was compared favourably with that of the great soprani who had made world-wide reputations.

Mdlle. Effi came to New York and created a furore. Her triumph was secured from the first night. Her grace, her beauty, her amiability, all were lauded to the skies, and as for her voice, the poets of the American Press were at their wits' ends for metaphors concerning it.

One night in the green-room, between the acts, a story was circulated about a man, one of the chorus singers, who was said to be dying under very terrible circumstances. He had stumbled the previous night, on his way home, over something in the road, and, in trying to save himself, had fallen with his face full on the live coke of a chestnut-roaster which was left for a moment uncovered.

"Ah!" said one of the singers, "it's a sad story; the man's been an awful blackguard, but his daughter's one of the best-paid burlesque actresses of the day, and she won't do anything for him."

"She's in New York now," said a bystander; "and they sent to her to say that her father was dying, and asked to see her."

- "Didn't she go?" asked the prima-donna.
- "No; sent word back she declined to see the person."
- "How horrible!" exclaimed Mdlle. Effi. "Poor old man! What's his name?"

[&]quot;Jack Effingham!"

Jack Effingham! The prima-donna started when she heard the words. That had been her father's name. Her mother had told her the miserable story when she was old enough to know it.

She got through the part, suppressing the emotion that she felt; but directly the curtain fell she hurried to her dressing-room, and sent for the manager.

"I have heard of this case of the chorus singer who is so shockingly burnt," she said, "and whose daughter is so cruel. I wish to see him—to-night."

"To-night!" exclaimed the manager. "My dear young lady, the neighbourhood is a low one; the man was carried home to his garret."

"I will go," answered the prima-donna. "Will you have the goodness to drive me to the house, and wait for me?"

Prime-donne have strange fancies at times, and a wise impresario always humours them. The manager was wise in this instance, and, seeing further argument was thrown away, consented.

It was striking midnight when the beautiful Blanche Effi, the famous diva, entered the foul garret, where a poor broken-down chorus singer lay in agony, moaning out the last hours of his life.

The mercy which often in a time of supreme torture robs men of their senses had been denied to him.

As Blanche entered the room the man turned his head. He recognised the prima-donna. He thought it good of her to come and see a burnt disfigured outcast like himself.

She sat down in her costly furs on the rough chair by the dying man's bed.

"Your daughter will not come to see you?" she said softly.

"No. Ah! it's hard—very hard," he moaned. "I haven't a living soul that knows me to speak a kind word to me now!"

"Yes, you have. Father!---"

The man started up in his bed and glared at her.

"What did you say? Who are you?"

"I am Blanche Effingham—the daughter you left nineteen years ago. When I heard your name to-night I asked about your history. You are my father!"

"Great God!"

For a moment the dying man could say no more. The past was rushing through his brain. This glorious creature—this gentle lady, then, was the daughter he had deserted, and this was the way she repaid his treachery. O what a terrible mistake his life had been!

"You have a daughter now, father," said the beautiful prima-donna gently. "My mother forgave you on her deathbed, and bade me forgive you too. This is for her—this for me."

Twice the sweet lips touched the seared face gently, and then the tears ran down from the dying man's eyes, as he cried aloud,

"God is more merciful—than I deserve. Poor Clara! May my sin to her and to you be forgiven!"

"Amen!" whispered Blanche Effingham. Then she took the trembling hand of the old chorus singer in hers, and held it tightly clasped while the hours stole on.

* * * * *

There is a beautiful marble cross over a new-made grave in one of the cemeteries of New York. It is sacred to the memory of John Effingham, formerly of London, and is erected by "his daughter, Blanche."

No. XX.

A LOVE LETTER.

Marian Halstead, standing by the open door of Ferndale Villa, and plucking a rose from the splendid Marshal Niel that twined about the porch, made a very pretty picture. The house was pretty, the roses were pretty, the garden was pretty, and Marian was—well, no, pretty is hardly the word for her. She was a handsome brunette, with dark lustrous eyes, and raven's-wing tresses. Presently, when a yellow Marshal Niel had been placed coquettishly in her hair, the picture was complete. A lace mantilla and a high comb would have converted her into a perfect type of those Andalusian beauties that smile upon us from the canvases of the famous artists who go to the sunny South for the warmth and glow and colour which fashion and climate are gradually sponging out of English landscape and English figure alike.

You haven't to look twice at Marian Halstead to see that she is proud and ambitious, or to guess the title which, were you an artist, you would give to her picture—"The Coquette." You can see the words in fancy in the Academy catalogue directly you look at the dark-eyed beauty framed in the rose-bedecked doorway.

Marian fastens the Marshal Niel in her hair, and then comes leisurely down the garden walk to the gateway. She shades her eyes from the glare of the sun, and looks up

the long, white, dusty road, as though she expected to see a familiar form there.

Is the coquette waiting for the gallant knight who shall ride by and beg that rose of her, as knights were wont to do in the old days of love and chivalry?

It looks like it, for here comes a horseman; and as he turns the corner, and rides straight for the villa, Marian's olive cheeks flush with a warm glow.

But this knight carries no lance and wears no armour. He has on a light tweed suit which would be shockingly dangerous in a tournament or a crusade, and in place of the helmet and nodding plume his headgear is a deerstalker hat adorned with a single small peacock's feather.

But if the young horseman—my lady readers have guessed he was young, for what coquette would blush at the approach of an old gentleman on a weight-carrier?—but if the young horseman was not a knight of the old sort, he could claim plenty among his ancestors. Sir Harry Earnshaw was the young lord of many a broad acre in that part of Surrey where Ferndale Villa stood, and he had a hall, called Earnshaw Hall, full of spears and coats of mail that had been carried by dead-and-gone Earnshaws into the thick of many an ancient mêlée.

Sir Guy Earnshaw had been killed in the Crusades, and his memory was much respected in consequence, although a scandal had been prevalent some centuries since that Sir Guy was slain by the infuriated papa of a Saracen maiden while planning an elopement. The Earnshaw tradition prefers to represent him as falling, lance in hand, in a particularly bloody battle, where the pagans were twelve to one Christian. There is a picture in the gallery at Earnshaw Hall representing the glorious death of the said Sir

Guy; and, as it was painted only a couple of centuries after the event by an Italian artist, there is no doubt that it is historically correct.

Then there was Sir Marmaduke Earnshaw, the gay Cavalier, who fell at Naseby fighting for his king, and who, when a pious Roundhead, seeing that his wound was mortal, bade him repeat a prayer, replied that he didn't know one, but, if a little French love-song would do as well, he should be happy to oblige the gentleman.

But the dead-and-gone Earnshaws are not worth lingering over this bright summer morning. Let their old bones lie in peace in the family vault. Sir Harry, as he reins up his steed, and doffs his hat to Marian Halstead, is a far pleasanter subject to contemplate.

- "Going to the ball on Thursday, of course, Miss Halstead?" he says.
- "Oh, yes," answers Marian; "at least, I think so, if mamma is no worse."
 - "Is Mrs. Halstead better to-day?"
- "She seems so—but"—here the girl hesitated—"but she's dreadfully trying."
- "I'm afraid you don't have a very pleasant time of it at home always."

Marian looks up at Sir Harry, and meets his eyes; a deep blush mantles her cheek.

"Not always," she stammers; "but mamma is such an invalid, you know, and we are so worried sometimes about poor papa's affairs."

Marian sighs. Her poor papa's affairs have been the bane of her life. Reared in extravagance, taught to believe that they had only to wish and have, Mrs. Halstead and her daughter found, a year or two since, when Mr. Halstead

died suddenly, that his affairs were terribly involved, that for years he had been living beyond his income, and that henceforward they would have to content themselves with a state of existence known as genteel poverty.

The young girl hesitated as she referred to her father's affairs, and bit her lip. Of course Sir Harry knew all about it through his brother Hubert; but it wasn't pleasant for Marian to think that this wealthy young squire knew that the and her mother only kept one servant, and had their dresses made at home.

The Halsteads and the Earnshaws were old acquaintances; but Harry had been absent from the scene for a long time. He had been recalled from a grand tour round the world to take up the family honours only two months since. He was in Africa lion shooting when his father died, and he came back to find Marian Halstead engaged to his younger brother Hubert.

When they were girl and boy together, Marian and Harry had been sweethearts; but Harry had gone to college, and then abroad, and Hubert—quiet, stay-at-home Hubert—had become Marian's cavalier.

It was a good match for the girl under all circumstances. Hubert had a fair allowance under his father's will, and a little property from his mother. Marian had absolutely nothing but her beauty; for when the wreck of her father's fortune could be estimated, it was found hardly sufficient to enable her mother to keep on Ferndale Villa—a little bijou place which, in better days, the Halsteads had used for about a month in the year.

When Sir Harry came back from abroad, Hubert took him over at once to see the Halsteads, and told him how the land lay. Hubert wanted his brother to exert his influence with Marian's mother. The old lady was a terrible invalid, and suffering had marred her temper. She had crotchets, and not always agreeable ones. One of them was, that there should be no formal engagement between Marian and Hubert until the former was nineteen. As Marian was only eighteen, Hubert would have a whole year to wait before he could even consider himself engaged to the girl he worshipped, and for whom he would have sacrificed everything.

Of course, between themselves they had plighted their troth. Marian was far too romantic a girl to turn a deaf ear to the wooing of her handsome swain, and they quite looked upon themselves as sweethearts.

Harry interested himself in his brother's cause, and rode over at once. He was the head of the family now, and of course it was his duty to interest himself in his brother's future.

The young baronet urged his brother's cause with Mrs. Halstead bravely, but the lady was obdurate. She gave her reasons clearly and decidedly. "Hubert is not rich," she said; "Marian has nothing. Both of them ought to look to marriage as a means of mending their fortune. Hubert should marry an heiress, Marian should marry a wealthy man. Of course, if they prefer love in a cottage, I can't help it, but there shall be no formal engagement until they have both had time to see if they have quite made up their minds." Of course this was a very worldly way of looking at the question, but after all there are many mothers who would agree with Mrs. Halstead, and applaud the course she had adopted.

Sir Harry saw plainly he could be of no use. He told Hubert so, and he told Marian so. After that he came over once or twice again with Hubert, and then he took to coming alone. He brought rare flowers and hothouse fruit from the hall—always for Mrs. Halstead of course, and he took to riding by Ferndale Villa almost every morning, and he felt quite disappointed if Marian was not there.

She generally was there. Of course it was mere accident, but somehow or other it happened that just at the time Sir Harry usually passed Marian would be in the garden gathering flowers or standing at the gate.

At first Sir Harry merely raised his hat, and said it was a fine day, then he became anxious about Mrs. Halstead's health, and by-and-by the conversation at the gate would last a good ten minutes, and Sir Harry would be loth to ride on even then, and he would turn round quietly and see Marian still standing at the gate and watching him out of sight. And all this time poor Hubert was up in London, whither he had gone to read for the Bar, determined that he would qualify himself to make a large income, and so have something to urge in his own defence when Mrs. Halstead reproached him with the smallness of his prospects.

He had every faith in Marian. Had they not sworn constancy over and over again? But he was afraid of the worldly-minded mother. Harry had reported the result of his interview, and Hubert was shrewd enough to see the drift of it. It meant that if Marian chose to throw herself away on Hubert she might, but Mrs. Halstead would give her a chance of escape.

After he had been away a month he came down to the hall for a day or two, and went over to Ferndale Villa to see Marian.

She was very kind and gentle; and once, when he was talking hopefully of the future, and what he meant to do, the tears came into her eyes.

"Poor Marian," he thought, "how she loves me!" He reasoned to himself that he would be worthy of her—that she should never regret linking her fate with his.

He went back to London more hopeful than ever, and he told Harry what he intended to do. He went into raptures over Marian's noble nature and gentle heart; and when his brother didn't respond so heartily as he might have done, Hubert chaffed him.

"Ah, I forgot you're a general lover, Harry," he said. "You've knocked about the world, and hardened your heart; but some day you'll fall in love, and then you'll understand me better."

The baronet didn't even smile at that; he stroked his silky moustache nervously, and went and looked out of the window.

"I suppose you mean to marry and give the Hall a mistress some day, Harry," said Hubert, rising and standing beside his brother in the bay window that looked over Earnshaw Park.

"Yes, some day," answered Harry. "By Jove!" he added suddenly, "I've promised to meet Johnston at the stables; he'll be waiting."

And there and then Sir Harry marched out of the room.

Hubert looked after him, and shook his head.

"I'm afraid I've touched an open wound," he said to himself; "Harry isn't usually afraid of keeping his grooms waiting for him."

But no thought of what was really distressing his elder brother crossed the young man's mind, and he went back to town again to work harder than ever, and when he wasn't poring over the musty old law books, his visions were haunted by the beautiful face of Marian Halstead—his faithful, loving Marian, who was the good angel of his life, and who was going some day to be his wife.

* * * * *

"Marian, I can hide the secret from you no longer! I feel that I am a traitor to Hubert—that I am wicked and unbrotherly, but my love has conquered every scruple. Oh, Marian! have you not seen for months past that I love you?"

"Sir Harry, don't!"

Marian Halstead had turned her head away. Her cheeks were crimson, and her bosom heaved and fell rapidly with suppressed emotion.

Sir Harry and Marian had been standing together in the twilight by the garden gate of Ferndale Villa. The baronet had walked over with some grapes for Mrs. Halstead; he had taken his leave, and Marian had seen him to the door.

He had taken her hand, and was bidding her good-bye, when he lost all control over his feelings, and the words that had so long been trembling on his lips were spoken.

Marian Halstead would have turned and fled, but her lover held her hand.

"Marian, you must—you shall—hear me! Let us not make three lives miserable by a fatal mistake. I love you sincerely and devotedly! With you for my wife, life will be a golden dream; without you my fortune will be a mockery. Tell me you love me! Tell me with your lips. I have read it in your eyes long ago!"

Marian hesitated for a moment; then the fierce energy of her lover carried her away.

- "I love you," she murmured; "but you must go away, and never see me again."
- "No. If you love me, my duty is to stay here. You cannot marry Hubert, loving me; it would be a sin, and no happiness could come of it."
- "But I am engaged to Hubert," stammered the girl; and—and——" Here Marian gave way. The excitement was too much for her, and her speech was broken by little hysterical sobs.

The twilight had deepened in the semi-darkness of a late summer night. Gently the young baronet drew the weeping girl towards him, till her head rested on his shoulder.

- "Marian," he whispered; "this is a terrible crisis in our lives. How can you ever marry Hubert when your heart is mine?"
- "What will he think—what will he say?" murmured the young girl.
- "He will bear it bravely when he knows the truth, Marian. You are not engaged yet, so that no faith is broken. Write and tell him at once. Your mother was a wise woman; she foresaw the future."
- "Mamma wants me to marry you, I know," sobbed Marian.

It was true. From the moment the young baronet had returned, Mrs. Halstead had exerted her influence with Marian to bring about a rupture with Hubert. She had painted in the most vivid colours the misery of genteel poverty. The girl had seen enough of it to know what it meant. Marian Halstead was proud and ambitious. The idea of passing her whole life among the humiliations and troubles which come of a limited income horrified her.

She contrasted her position as the younger brother's wife with what it would be if she married Sir Harry, and became mistress of Earnshaw Hall. She liked Hubert very much, but she persuaded herself that she had never known what love was till Sir Harry came riding by.

After all, she was *not* engaged to Hubert. It had been a childish affair, very romantic and sentimental; but there was really nothing dreadful in breaking it off, after all. It seemed rather cruel at first; but gradually Marian's scruples melted away before the enchantment of Sir Harry's offer, and the contrasted vision in which she indulged of splendour and happiness with the one brother, and genteel poverty and misery with the other.

Mrs. Halstead was a good friend to the baronet while the struggle was going on in Marian's mind. She knew where the weak parts of her daughter's character were, and there she planted her shafts.

A fortnight after Sir Harry's declaration, Mrs. Halstead wrote a polite and most motherly epistle to the young man in London. Divested of its verbiage and sugar-coating, it said that Marian Halstead, having fully considered the offer he had made for her hand, felt compelled to decline it, her affection being given elsewhere. The letter further informed Hubert that a match having been arranged with her full consent and approbation between Marian and Sir Harry, Mrs. Halstead earnestly hoped Hubert would see the advisability of returning Marian's letters if he had any, and no doubt his gentlemanly feeling would prompt him to discontinue his visits to Ferndale Villa, at any rate until after Marian had left it to become Lady Earnshaw.

It was intended to be a kind and polite letter, but it was hard, worldly, and cruel. It stabbed the young man to the

heart, and he refused to believe his Marian guilty of such conduct. She was the victim of her mother's design. He would go to her, and plead his cause himself. He would take his dismissal from her lips alone. Half beside himself with grief and anxiety, he left London on his eventful errand. He avoided the Hall, for he would not trust himself to meet his mother. He went straight to Ferndale Villa, and was refused. The servant came to the door and informed him that Miss Marian was not at home, and that Mrs. Halstead was too ill to see him.

He did not believe it. He waited about, working himself up into a fever of excitement.

Towards evening he determined to go up to the Hall and see his brother. His heart was full of resentment, and burned to unburden itself in words. Marian had been lured away from him by treachery, and the traitors were her mother and his brother.

Half-way to the Hall he met Marian. She would have passed him, but he would not let her. He asked her what it all meant—if it was true? Marian was frightened at first, but she gathered courage beneath her lover's torrent of reproach. She professed to be indignant. She told him that she had never loved him—that it was a childish affair, which they ought both to have outgrown long ago—that she loved Sir Harry, and would be his wife, and then he (Hubert) would be her brother—as a brother she was sure she should love him very much. Then she asked him for ther letters.

He had grown very stern and quiet while Marian spoke. The scales were dropping from his eyes. He saw now that it was Marian's ambition which had prompted her to jilt him. She sacrificed her love to her brother's wealth and title.

"Your letters shall be sent to you, Miss Halstead," he said. "You can return mine. I don't want my brother to amuse himself with them."

"You wrong me, Hubert, and you wrong him. We both feel deeply for you."

"You are very good—both of you. Send me the letters back, at any rate."

They had walked near to Ferndale Villa, talking.

"You want me to bid you good evening and go. You don't want the people about here to see you walking with me now."

"It is known I am engaged to Sir Harry," murmured Marian, "and it is known we were sweethearts—as—boy and girl."

"It is a lie, Marian!" exclaimed Hubert, fiercely; "we were more than boy and girl sweethearts—we were engaged in the sight of Heaven, and you were my promised wife."

He thrust his hand into his breast, and drew out a letter which he had carried next his heart.

"See!" he exclaimed, "you wrote that but six short months ago."

Marian looked at the note. It was a short, sweet little love-letter—one she had written Hubert before his brother came back, and it was signed, "Your promised wife, Marian."

"It was foolish of me to write that, but it meant nothing," exclaimed Marian, angrily.

The next moment she had snatched the letter from Hubert's trembling hand, crumpled it up, and flung it down on the ground.

"Traitress!" cried the young man; "as that letter lies there—that letter which proves you forsworn—so may your

hopes lie some day trodden in the dust. If there's a heaven it will deal with you as you have dealt with me."

The words were spoken in a fierce frenzy of passion—the next moment Hubert would have withdrawn them. He had wished to part with his old sweetheart calmly and bravely, as became an English gentleman whose noble heart a woman had made her toy. But when he would have spoken again and said good-bye for ever, Marian was gone. Terrified at her lover's curse and his wild accents, she had darted from him and entered the house.

* * * * *

The next day, as Sir Harry came riding along the high road, he looked eagerly towards the gate of Ferndale Villa-Marian was there waiting to see him. He had heard that his brother had been in the neighbourhood, and he was anxious to hear if Marian had seen him.

Sir Harry was riding a magnificent horse—a new purchase of which he was very proud. He was a splendid horseman, and knew it. As he came near Ferndale Villa he touched the horse with his whip, and set it prancing and curvetting. The horse was a nervous, highly-strung creature. Just as it came up to where Marian stood, the wind, which was high, dislodged a crumpled piece of paper from the hedge, and sent it fluttering across the road straight in the path of the baronet's horse.

It was all done in a moment.

The sudden apparition of the rustling paper caused the horse to shy violently. Sir Harry was looking at Marian, and had loosed the reins. The next second he was lying in the roadway, still and motionless. The horse had thrown him violently, in its sudden terror at the rustling paper; and when presently, after the senseless man had been

carried into Ferndale Villa, the cause of all the misery was picked up, and smoothed out, it was found to be a love-letter, signed "Your promised wife, Marian."

* * * *

There is a new baronet at Earnshaw Hall. The servants call him Sir Hubert. He is single, and they say he will never marry. He had a disappointment once, and will never trust woman again. He came to the title and estates on the death of his brother, Sir Harry, who was thrown from his horse, and died of concussion of the brain. Ferndale Villa is let to a literary gentleman from London, who lives there about three months in the year, smokes short clays in the garden, and horrifies the neighbours by reading newspapers on Sunday at his front window, without having the decency to draw the blinds down. They say that some day he intends to write a story about "The Love Letter": but he has an idea that people will put it all down to his invention, though, of course, it all actually occurred within a hundred yards of where he sits and writes, and smokes his pipe.

Mrs. Halstead and her daughter have moved away to another part of Surrey. Mrs. Halstead is more trying than ever, and Marian's lot is a hard one. She will never cease to regret having jilted her first love, or to believe that the death of her second was due to the hand of Providence. She feels that there was something more than coincidence in the fulfilment of Hubert's curse—a fulfilment to the letter.

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